

BROTHER SCOUTS

BY

JOHN FINNEMORE

Author of 'The Lone Patrol,' 'Teddy Lester's Chums,'
'His First Term,' 'Three School Chums,' &c.

WITH SIX COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS

by

W. H. C. Groome

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BROTHER SCOUTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE FISHING-SAMPAN.

THE two Boy Scouts lay on the parapet of a broad stone bridge, their wide-brimmed hats tipped back to keep the hot sun from their necks, their eyes scanning a busy scene on the waterway below.

The bridge spanned the mouth of a creek branching from the main stream, and the boys were watching the movements of the craft which passed the mouth of the creek. It was a scene upon which few Scouts have ever looked, for the waterway lay beside a river town of China, and was packed with the marvellous mass of craft which swarms on a Chinese stream.

Sampans, rafts, junks, house-boats, chop-boats, little flitting steam-launches, everything that floats, that is driven by oar or sail, that is poled, that is pulled by a tow-rope, seemed to be represented on that crowded channel.

'Say, Jack,' said one of the Scouts, 'look at little Wong going out to fish. I like his crew! They'd have him up in our town at home for cruelty to children.'

Wong the fisherman was pushing out of a mass of skiffs on his way down-stream to a fishing-ground. His boat was about twenty feet long and five in the beam. From its side projected sticks wrapped round with straw, and on these perches sat five pairs of sulky-looking fishing cormorants, each with ring round neck and long curved beak drooping towards the water.

Wong himself was busy about something in the bow, and the little vessel was being driven by the single oar everywhere used in China, the sculling-oar known as the *yoolo*.

The *yoolo* was worked by two children. A little girl of seven or eight was throwing her small weight with wonderful dexterity on the handle, a much tinier boy was steadily and patiently jerking the rope which changes the course of the blade.

'They do set 'em to work pretty young here,' replied Jack Burnet, the second Scout. 'I've seen even smaller kiddies than those pegging at it, and doing the work jolly well, too!'

* 'Say, 'it's a rum country,' murmured his companion.

The last speaker had only been in China a

few months. His name was Lew Standing, and he was an American boy. His companion, Jack Burnet, was English, and both were the sons of merchants whose houses stood in the foreign settlement beyond the city of Wushan, whose crowded streets, crowned by a lofty pagoda, were enclosed by the yellow walls to be seen five hundred yards up-stream. Among the boys of the foreign settlement a patrol of Boy Scouts had been formed—the Eagle Patrol. Jack was patrol-leader; Lew was corporal. Jack had spent almost the whole of his life in China, and the things which filled Lew with wonder were to him the commonplaces of everyday life.

Now there swept into sight a big mandarin chop-boat, a huge sort of Noah's Ark, in which some grandee was upon his travels. In the distance it looked like a floating house, for the great varnished cabin rose high above the broad hull, and the vessel swarmed with people. Its approach was heralded from afar, for an immense gong was hung forward, and a coolie hammered away at it without ceasing.

Crash!—bang!—boom-boom!—bang!—crash! on came the big boat down the centre of the stream, its huge sails of matting widely spread, and a favouring breeze astern, while the coolie banged the gong and the smaller craft scuttled right and left out of the way.

'Say,' murmured Lew, 'that old mandarin wants all the river to himself.'

'They always do,' laughed Jack; 'that's what the gong's for. It says, "Now, then, all you little three-a-penny mud-scrapers, get out of my way!"'

'And if they don't?' asked Lew.

'Then they'll see trouble,' replied Jack.

At the very next moment the truth of Jack's words was proved. On came the big house-boat, and they could see the mandarin himself seated inside the great cabin, an elderly man in magnificent silken robes, his withered, yellow face surmounted by a high, stiff cap and adorned by great round goggles.

The Scouts were staring at him, when, between the strokes of the gong, they caught a piercing cry.

They looked ahead of the big boat, and saw Wong's skiff right under its bows. The little girl had been driving the fishing-craft across the stream, and her strength had not sufficed to drive it quickly enough.

Wong was leaping from the bows towards the sculling-oar; but at a glance the boys saw that he would be too late, and would never get the skiff out of the way.

On board the big boat not the smallest attention was paid to the distress of Wong and

his children. The coolie continued to bang the gong; three or four others, lounging on the forward deck, stared placidly down at the skiff. The mandarin never moved a muscle of his waxen features.

'It'll be over them!' shouted Lew; and as the words left his lips, it was over them indeed.

The big vessel, driven by its broad sails, crushed the fishing-skiff as a hammer might crush an egg-shell, and drove it under, while the cormorants took to flight with a most dismal squawking.

'Come on!' cried Jack; 'this is a Scout's job, Lew. We must get those youngsters out.'

The head of the tiny boy bobbed up in the wake of the chop-boat; it could be recognised by its rats' tails of hair. No sign of the little girl was to be seen, and in an instant the boy's head sank again.

Not a hand was held out to save the drowning children. A Chinaman will never rescue any one in distress in the water; he firmly believes that the person rescued will only live to do his rescuer some great injury. Jack knew this, and, pitching hats down and shoes beside them, both Scouts leapt into the water-way and swam swiftly to the scene of the wreck of the fishing-boat. Jack saw something below the muddy surface, grabbed at it, and

found he had hold of the little boy. Almost at the same moment, Lew struck his foot against a submerged mass, as he trod water to look round. He dived at once, seized an arm, and brought the girl up, and the Scouts swam ashore with the rescued children.

They had hardly dumped them on the bank when Wong himself followed. He had been slightly injured in the collision, and had now pulled himself together and managed to swim ashore.

Jack made a swift rush for their hats and shoes, and managed to get hold of them before the throng of staring onlookers had become so thick as to afford cover for a thief to carry them off. He then called on Lew to follow, and hurried away up the tow-path beside the little creek spanned by the bridge upon which they had stayed their steps to look at the doings on the stream.

'We'll hook it!' he said to his companion.

They went half a mile up the narrow path between the creek and the broad fields of rice, and came upon a patch of ground where boats of various shapes and sizes had been drawn ashore, or were floating beside a small slip.

It was the yard of Tang the boat-builder, and here lay Jack's sampan, the native boat which he owned and used on the river. It

had been damaged by running on a snag, and Tang was mending it. He had promised to have it ready two days ago.

The boys meant to board* the sampan, and row to a small town twelve miles down the river. Mr Burnet had a 'go-down' (a native warehouse) there, and he wished to know how stood the stock of goods in the hands of his agent. Jack had volunteered to go and see, and Lew was accompanying him. They would stay with the agent for the night, and return on the next day.

Almost the first thing Jack saw in Tang's yard was his own sampan, with the repairs by no means completed. Tang, a big, lean fellow, in tattered blue garments, came out of a little shed, and Jack went at him at once, reminding him of his many promises.

'Can do,' said Tang tranquilly 'Can do. Bime-by. Bime-by.'

'By-and-by, you lazy old tinker!' cried Jack. 'There'll be no "bime-by" about this! You just pitch in and finish it while we wait!'

Tang made a score of excuses; but Jack overruled them all, and at last the Chinaman set to work.

When he had once been got to work, Tang made good headway, and in a couple of hours the sampan was once more ready for the water.

Part of this time the Scouts spent drying their clothes; they took them off and hung them in the hot sun on a small bamboo which over-spread a neat little house of brick which stood at the water's edge. This house was really a tomb, in which Tang's father had been buried a few years before, for in China tombs are in view on all hands. They stand at the sides of roads—in the corners of rice-fields—here, there, and everywhere.

The Scouts had a swim in the creek to fill up their time; then lay in the shadow of the tomb to dry off, for they had no towels.

As soon as the sampan was ready, they embarked and set off down the creek.

'We must make her spin,' said Jack, 'for we've lost a good bit of time, what with one thing and another.' Lew nodded.

They soon slid out of the creek under the bridge and into the main waterway, and here they hoisted a small mast and the handful of sail, which was all that the sampan could carry, and slipped through the water at ease, Jack steering with a small oar.

They had gone barely two miles when the wind dropped, and they had to take to the oar again; and a couple of miles farther on they caught up the house-boat which had run Wong's skiff down.

The mandarin's boat was now moving very slowly. Its sail was down, and it was being tracked along—that is to say, the coolie sailors who formed its crew were now out on the bank and lined along a tow-rope, dragging the heavy craft at the rate of about a mile an hour.

As the Scouts passed the big boat they took a good look at it, and it was worth looking at. The windows of the cabin were of plate-glass instead of the paper or shell which fills the window-frames of poorer craft. In the cabin still sat the stately old mandarin, in his splendid robes of silk, and Jack noted the beautiful embroidery of a kind of medallion worked in front of his jacket. They now saw that there were some women in the hinder part of the cabin—his wife, and her maids, dressed in rich silks and satins, with jewelled pins thrust into their glossy black hair. Clearly this was a very wealthy family on the move somewhere. Behind the cabin was a small shed, formed of matting, and here the cook was busy with pots and pans, while a charcoal fire smoked in a brazier.

'Say, Jack,' murmured Lew, 'these people carry their home with them when they travel.'

'They're bound to,' replied Jack; 'there are no fit places for people of this style to stay at. There are only little tea-houses and rest-

houses where pedlars and coolies put up. And this old chap is a big military mandarin; he belongs to the fourth class of those swells.'

'How do you know?' asked Lew.

'Because the button on his cap was light blue, and he wore the pheasant embroidery on his silk jacket,' replied Jack. 'That's the regular style with the military order of big-wigs.'

An hour later the comrades were still plying the *yoolo*, when Lew remarked quietly, 'I guess old Tang was in too much of a hurry to finish, after all.'

'What's wrong?' asked Jack.

Lew pointed, and Jack saw that the water was oozing steadily in at the part where the sampan had been repaired.

'Sprung a leak, eh?' said Jack. 'So that's old Tang's style of mending a boat, is it? Burst right out again at the same spot. We'll run her ashore, and see if we can make the damage good.'

They were passing the mouth of a narrow creek, and into this the sampan was turned. It was lucky they were not farther out in the broad stream, for hardly had the sampan been driven into the shallow inflow than the plank gave; the water bubbled and gurgled about their feet, and the little vessel sank in about two feet of water.

The Scouts scrambled ashore, wet to their knees, and stared blankly at their craft.

'Shipwrecked!' said Jack. 'Here's a go! What are we going to do?'

Lew pointed across the flat fields to a cluster of cottages a long way down the creek.

'Can't we go there and get some of the people to help raise the sampan?' he said. 'They'd come like anything for a few coins.'

Jack shook his head decidedly. 'They'd come fast enough, old chap,' he replied; 'but we don't want 'em at any price. That place has got a bad name, and it hasn't got it for nothing; as like as not they'd pitch us into the river and bag the ship.'

Lew whistled. 'Just as well to say nothing about our little fix to them,' he remarked.

'Just as well,' rejoined Jack. 'I vote we wait till the "glass-boat" comes up, and we'll see if we can get a hand from them.'

A 'glass-boat' is, so called because it has glass windows to its big cabin, and ranks far above those which can only boast of windows made of oiled paper or the shining inner scales of oyster-shells.

While waiting for the mandarin's house-boat to come up, the Scouts had a good try at raising the sampan themselves; but it was just beyond their power.

Time passed swiftly as the two boys struggled with their sunken craft, and at last Jack glanced at his watch.

'Where under the sun is that boat?' he said. 'It ought to have been up long ago.'

'Listen!' said Lew, and raised his hand.

They listened, and heard the faint and distant echo of an uproar. Coolies were yelling like mad, yet distinctly in tune, and Jack recognised the chanting notes which coolies always raise when straining their muscles at a heavy task.

'Something wrong with them,' said Jack, whose experienced ear detected at once sounds in the hubbub which showed that no ordinary tracking work was in hand.

The Scouts trotted along the bank towards a grove of rushes which marked a bend of the stream. Beyond the rushes lay the scene of the uproar. As soon as they gained the place they saw what had happened. The heavy boat had grounded on a mud-bank, and the straining coolies were pulling with all their might on the big rope, while they howled and yelled like furies.

'She's aground,' said Jack. 'No use to ask them to lend a hand. They'll pull and howl and kick up no end of a bobbery till she floats again, and they won't have a look or a word for any one else.'

'Begins to look as if we sha'n't see Ho-Chow to-night,' said Lew.

'That we sha'n't,' said Jack decidedly. 'For one thing, we're on the wrong side of the river, and if we pushed on to look for a ferry, and left the sampan, we should never see it again. Somebody would drop on to it as if he'd come out of the sky, and it would be nailed in no time.'

'I'll stop and watch it while you go on—you know the country,' said Lew.

But Jack shook his head. 'No go,' he replied; 'it's too jolly near dark for us to separate. We'll have to sleep out on the bank, and see what can be done in the morning. Lucky for us, the weather's warm and dry, and we've got some grub.'

They returned to the place where the sampan had sunk, and sat down on the bank near at hand. The scene still had its former loneliness, and no buildings were in sight save the distant village, its roofs almost hidden in groves of bamboos, and quite near at hand a large and elaborate tomb, quite a little house in itself, with very wide eaves turned up at the corners.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN THE GRAVE.

THREE hours later, the thought of the wide eaves of the big brick-built grave came into Jack's mind. Night had fallen; there was no moon, but a host of glorious stars filled the sky, and by their silver light Jack was keeping watch.

They had drawn straws for first turn, and it had fallen to the patrol-leader. In many places along the river both would have turned in on the warm dry grass and slept without fear; but as fortune had stranded them in a neighbourhood which bore an evil name, Jack had thought it best that one should keep guard. Beside him Lew was sleeping soundly.

With the fall of night there had been no cooling air, no refreshing dew; but the sultry heat seemed to thicken and become still heavier.

'This means a thunderstorm,' said Jack to himself, for he knew all about the weather signs in a Chinese summer, and when an ebon pile of cloud rose in the south-west and began to blot out the stars, he was not surprised.

Presently a great flash of lightning leapt from

the inky mass, and there was a furious peal of thunder.

Lew woke instantly. 'What's that?' he said.

'Thunderstorm swinging up,' replied Jack. 'See, there's another flash.'

'We're in for a wet shirt apiece this time,' remarked Lew.

'I don't know,' said Jack. 'I was just thinking of that tomb along the bank there. If we nipped under those big eaves on the lee-side we should be in jolly good shelter.'

Lew shivered a little. It seemed a trifle creepy to him to shelter behind a grave; but Jack did not notice the shiver, and would hardly have understood it if he had observed it; for he had seen tombs dotted about in every corner of the country all his life, and took no more notice of them than if they had been summer-houses.

'Come on,' said Jack; 'that storm's coming up at full speed.'

They sprang to their feet and walked swiftly along the bank, their steps guided by the fierce glare of the frequent lightning-flashes. Midway of the lee-wall of the tomb, they curled themselves close to the masonry, and glanced up to see that the wide eaves projected well beyond their feet and would give good shelter.

'We'll be snug and dry here,' said Jack, 'for the ground slopes away from the wall.'

'This is a trifle different from what we expected,' said Lew—'camping out here instead of being in Ho-Chow. But where's the lightning gone to? There hasn't been a flash for quite a while, and how black it has gone!'

'Yes,' returned Jack, 'the clouds have covered up the stars, I expect the storm is working up, even though the thunder and lightning have lifted for the present. It may burst over us at any moment.'

For some moments they sat without saying a word. Then Jack gave a short laugh, and was about to speak when Lew clutched his arm.

'What's that? What's that?' whispered the corporal.

Jack listened, and his heart gave a leap in his breast. There was a stir—a movement in the grave against which they leaned. They heard it plainly, for the silence was profound.

Then Lew jumped—he could not help it—for a voice came from the tomb—a low, hoarse voice, speaking with a curious muffled note. It spoke in Chinese. Lew had no idea of the meaning, but Jack understood perfectly.

'Has the time come?' said the man in the grave.

Jack rose to the situation like a true Scout. In a voice which he made as deep as he could, he replied, 'Not yet.'

'Are they all here?' said the voice from the tomb.

'Not all of them,' returned Jack.

He had not the faintest idea what it meant—or stay, yes; a glimmer of the situation had crossed his mind, for he knew so much more of the country than his companion. This faint notion had caused him to play the part he did, and frame some reply or other on the spur of the moment.

There was a fresh sound of movement within the tomb. Jack seized Lew's arm, and both Scouts leapt to their feet and darted silently away.

As they took their first stride, a flash of lightning burst from the dark cloud and a rattling peal of thunder ran along the sky straight overhead. By the light of the flash the Scouts saw a thick clump of rushes thirty yards away. They flew for it, dropped into cover, and lay as close as a hare in her form.

'Say, Jack,' breathed Lew, 'what does it mean?'

'It's all right,' whispered the patrol-leader. 'That tomb's empty. The mouth is on the other side, so we didn't know it. Some one has crept in there to sleep. Our voices wakened him up, and he spoke.'

'Golly!' murmured Lew. 'Is that it? Yes;

the first noise was just like some one waking up. But wasn't I just about scared? What did he say?'

'Oh, he's expecting some other fellow, I think,' replied Jack, 'and I made some sort of reply to fit with what he said.'

'Is there any harm in him?' whispered Lew.

'I don't know,' returned his companion; 'but this is the wrong place and time to take any chances. I wish another flash would come. Perhaps we could see him then if he has crept out.'

Scarcely were the words out of Jack's mouth when the flash came. By its vivid glare they saw the man from the tomb. He was moving swiftly round the little building, and something glittered in his hand. Lew suspected what it was; Jack knew. The latter pulled his companion down farther into the rushes.

'Down, Lew, down!—that's a sword,' he whispered.

'Is it one of the mandarin's guards?' asked Lew.

'Not a bit of it,' was the reply; 'this chap's nearly naked—it looks jolly ugly.'

They settled down into the reeds and listened with all their might. For a few moments the rolling echoes of the thunder deafened them.

Then a soft sound came to their straining ears.

Pad-pad — pad-pad—an uncanny and unpleasant sound. The mysterious swordsman was moving gently but swiftly about, clearly in search of the persons who had disturbed his rest.

The footsteps came near, and the Scouts held their very breath. Then there came a whole burst of flashes, so that for a matter of twelve seconds the light seemed continuous, and by its wild flare the two comrades saw a most strange and sinister figure. The swordsman was within seven paces of them; he was standing perfectly still, peering and listening, and he presented a sight which struck uneasiness to Jack's heart, for he knew it meant danger.

The man was immensely tall and powerfully built, as many Chinese are, and he wore nothing but a pair of straw sandals and trousers tightly lashed to his legs, coolie fashion. Above the waist he was bare, and his face was that of a demon, for he wore one of the horrible masks which the Chinese make and paint with such skill. Seen in the fitful light, he formed a picture at once dreadful and grotesque, it was threatening, too, for in his right hand he held a heavy, broad-bladed sword, one of those weapons with edge so keen and temper so fine that of their own weight they will inflict a most severe wound, and when driven by a strong arm they will cleave an opponent in twain.

The darkness fell once more, and the Scouts crouched without sound or movement. The same thought was in both minds—that the first crackle of the rushes under the giant's sandals should be the signal for flight; till then it was best to stick to the good cover.

At that instant a peculiar whistle, twice repeated, sounded from a point some forty yards away. The swordsman instantly replied in the same notes, but with a longer interval between the call. Then the flicker of a small lantern was seen, and a second figure approached.

'Why did you go away?' asked the swordsman.

'Go away?' replied the new-comer. 'I have only just come. The rest are following me.'

'Did you not speak and laugh near the tomb a few minutes ago? I was sleeping, but the sound awakened me.'

'No.'

The swordsman related how he had been disturbed.

'What did the men say?' asked the other.

'I do not know,' replied the giant. 'I remember now that the sounds were strange in my ears.'

'They were evil spirits,' said the other decidedly. 'You did ill to sleep in a tomb. It is known that many evil spirits trouble this place. Let us go.'

They moved away together, and the Scouts drew a deep breath. The conversation had been in the local dialect, and only Jack had followed it. Now he told Lew what he had heard.

‘What does it all mean?’ asked Lew. ‘Why was that big fellow wearing that horrible mask?’

‘To disguise himself,’ replied Jack. ‘There’s something queer afoot!’

CHAPTER III.

THE RIVER-PIRATES.

JACK had half-raised himself to peer round on the next flash of lightning, when he dropped as if he had been shot, and pressed down Lew, who was also rising.

The patrol-leader had caught a murmur of voices approaching them, and in a few moments a small band of men moved swiftly past their hiding-place, talking softly together. A couple of flashes gave the Scouts a glimpse of the newcomers. They were in all points the same as the first had been—naked of body, masked, bearing swords or spears—an evil, threatening crew.

As they passed, almost at arm's length, one of them made a remark which threw a flood of light into Jack's mind. From the first glimpse of the masked swordsman, he had suspected what they were; now he was sure.

'What are they?' whispered Lew again, for he was utterly puzzled by these strange figures.

'River-pirates!' murmured Jack—'that's what they are; and they are going to attack the mandarin's house-boat. Some of the crew are in league with them, I just heard one say how

clever it was of the steersman to run the boat on a mud-bank at the right spot for them to seize it.'

'River-pirates!' repeated Lew in an excited whisper. 'Then they mean to rob the boat?'

'Rob?' repeated Jack; 'it won't stop at that!'

'But they are not Chinese,' said Lew; 'not one of them had a pigtail hanging.'

'They are, though,' replied Jack. 'Every man has tucked his queue away under the top of his mask. A pigtail is an awkward thing to have flying loose in a rough-and-tumble fight in the dark; some one may easily lay hold of it.'

'Say, Jack,' murmured Lew, 'there are women on that boat.'

'There are,' returned Jack; 'we must do our best to give a warning. But we've got to be jolly careful; they'd chop us down at sight if they caught a glimpse of us.'

Lew nodded. He knew that Jack was right; for though he had not been a great while in China, he had already heard many tales of the ferocity of the river-pirates, who sometimes attack belated vessels on a lonely waterway, and kill every soul aboard before they make off with the loot.

Suddenly, with a hiss and a roar, the storm burst, and torrents of heavy rain descended. In a few moments the Scouts were wet to the skin.

'Come on,' said Jack; 'we can follow up under cover of this downpour, and the lightning is frequent enough to give us our bearings.'

So they crept out of the tuft of rushes, and made their way carefully and slowly along the inner slope of the tow-path, for here the latter fell away to a paddy (rice) field, which actually lay below the surface of the waterway.

Moving very cautiously, they gained a point from which they could look along the stretch of river where the floating house lay. They saw the boat at once, or, rather, the dim lights aboard which marked its position, and by the quietness they knew that the attack had not yet begun.

Suddenly the rain stopped, and a faint light began to grow on the face of the stream. They looked up, and saw that the storm was passing away as swiftly as it had arisen, and the stars were coming out again.

Across the dimly lighted surface of the water a black patch was moving almost directly towards them. Within three minutes it touched the bank a dozen yards below. It was a sampan, from which sprang three men.

The last to come ashore fastened the little skiff by a rope to a stake in the bank; then all three hastened down the path towards the point where the house-boat lay.

Jack caught a few words of the Chinese muttered among the men as they landed.

'They are late at the meeting-place,' whispered Jack to Lew. 'But here's a jolly good chance for us. We'll bag the sampan, and pull as hard as we can go for the chop-boat and warn them.'

'Come on,' replied Lew; and the Scouts slipped down the bank, unfastened the rope, and crept aboard the light, swift boat. The sweeps had been left lying along the gunwales; they were put out at once, and the Eagles took one each and softly swung the little craft out into the stream.

'Send her square out for a start,' whispered Jack. 'We must make a big sweep round and come up to the chop-boat on the other quarter; it won't do to go down alongshore.'

'Not much,' murmured Lew; 'they'd twig us if we did.'

'I say, Lew,' whispered Jack, 'there's one thing bothers me about this affair. I can't get it out of my head; I feel sure I know the voice of the big pirate, the one we first saw—the man who was asleep in the grave and came scouting round after us.'

'You do?' replied Lew in a tone of deep interest. 'Who is he?'

'I can't say,' returned Jack; 'I can't put a

name to him. I've been turning it over and over in my mind. Of course, his voice was muffled-like by that mask, and perhaps that throws me off a bit; but the sound of his voice haunts me. I feel as if I ought to know quite well 'who it was!'

'Perhaps it's some man about here whom you know,' suggested Lew.

'Don't know a soul in this neighbourhood,' replied Jack. 'I've passed up and down the river, but I've never landed here before.'

'It sounds jolly mysterious,' said Lew. 'Who can it be? It isn't likely any of your father's men at Wushan would be a pirate? There are plenty of big chaps among them.'

'No; they're all steady fellows, who have been with us a long time,' replied Jack. 'I can't make it out.'

'Hist!' said Lew. 'Look there! Look there! Down the bank!'

The thought of the mysterious pirate was at this moment driven from the minds of the two comrades by the sight of three lights held in the form of a triangle. They shone out for a few moments, then disappeared. Within a space of some ten seconds they shone out again; but now the upper light had become the lower, and the triangle was reversed. They vanished once more, and did not reappear.

'Signal to the traitors on board,' said Lew.

'That's about it,' said Jack. 'The attack may be made at any moment.'

They were now well out in the stream, and he swung round the head of the sampan with a powerful stroke.

'Give way,' murmured Jack; and the strong arms of the two Scouts made the light skiff fairly fly through the water.

Soon they were nearly abreast of the black mass of the big boat, and with another dexterous turn of his sweep Jack sent the sampan round, and they pulled straight for the threatened craft.

'Say, Jack, shall we let out a yell when we get alongside?' breathed Lew. 'That would rouse them as well as anything.'

'I know a trick worth two of that,' said Jack. 'I'll rouse 'em good and well, I fancy.'

He said no more, for the huge bulk of the house-boat was now looming almost directly above them, and he was carefully laying the sampan alongside her broad, blunt bow.

With a faint grating noise the boat brought up against the hull, and Jack, his hands outspread and groping in the dusk, seized a newel of the carved balustrade which ran round the forward deck, and swung himself up. He had kicked off his shoes and left them in the sampan,

so that he landed on the deck as lightly as a cat.

He moved swiftly forward, his hands again ^{out-}spread and searching, and so well had he gauged his course that at the fifth step his fingers ran against a smooth metal surface, so responsive to the slightest touch that a faint, deep musical note began to tremble in the air from the mere sweep of Jack's finger-tips across its face.

It was the big gong, the very thing for which Jack was searching, and he slipped his hand along to the stand where the heavy beater was hanging. At the next moment his fingers closed on the stout handle, and he swung it up and delivered a tremendous blow on the great resonant plate, and the rolling, booming notes crashed and rang from end to end of the boat and away across the water.

Zoom !—boom !—zoom !—crash ! The huge gong trembled, and gave out its deepest and most tremendous notes under the terrific tattoo which Jack played on its broad face. This was a method of arousing the house-boat with a vengeance.

But there were some who needed no rousing, who were already afoot and about their wicked, traitorous work, and they were just as busy on deck as Jack, but more amidships; for just as he struck his first tremendous notes, a great flare shot up on the roof of the big cabin. It had been

set going by the two men aboard who were in league with the pirates, and was intended to light the river-wolves to their prey.

In the great leaping flame every object on the deck stood out clearly as if the noonday sun had burst into the sky. There stood Jack, thumping away at the gong, half-a-dozen sailors were springing from the deck where they had lain down to sleep on their mats, and now over the side, towards the bank, rose the heads of the masked pirates as they swarmed to the assault.

They had counted on their frightful appearance, seen in the wild light of the leaping flare, to terrify all who should behold them; but what this uproar of the gong meant they knew not, and feared it would spoil their surprise.

First to the deck sprang their captain, the giant who had slept in the tomb. Yelling fiercely, he sprang forward with immense bounds, moving as swiftly as a great panther, in his sandals of straw, and swinging up his heavy sword to strike down the figure at the gong.

'Look out, Jack!' roared Lew. 'Jump! jump! There's one of them behind you!'

Jack heard nothing—saw nothing. The mighty thunder of the gong filled his ears, and his back was towards the taffrail over which the pirates were swarming. He thought the flare had sprung up in answer to his first strokes, and he was

putting all his strength into a few final crashing blows.

Suddenly some impulse—he knew not whence it came—caused him to turn his head sharply, and then he saw, too late, the position of fearful danger in which he stood. The huge figure of the mysterious pirate captain hung over him, and the bright blade swung high above his head.

It would have been all too late for Jack Burnet to save himself from that deadly stroke had his salvation depended upon his own movements. But the mere turning of his head seemed to check the swing of the heavy sword.

As the boy's face came round full into the light of the leaping flare, the pirate captain hung for a few seconds upon his blow. He seemed paralysed with amazement.

Jack did not see that the sword was arrested for a moment in its descent; he swung up the gong-stick, and held it to parry the blow—a poor chance of escape had the giant struck with the power he had meant to put behind the sweeping cut. Then at the next instant, a second sinister figure darted forward. It uttered a sharp cry at sight of Jack, dashed in, closed with him, and dragged him across the deck.

Struggling together, they came to the ship's side, and there Jack's assailant did a strange thing; for, without having hurt him or having offered

him any violence, save for his fierce, overmastering clutch, he bent, seized the Scout low, swung him upwards and outwards, and pitched him flying into the dark stream. .

Almost before Jack rose to the surface from his sudden immersion, the sampan was at his side, and he blew out the water, raised his hand, laid it on the low gunwale, and scrambled aboard, while Lew skilfully balanced the light craft.

‘Say, Jack,’ cried Lew, ‘have they hurt you?’

‘Not a bit,’ said Jack; ‘only dumped me overboard. I thought it was all up when I saw that big chap letting fly at me!’

‘So did I,’ cried Lew. ‘I can tell you, I just about let out a yell. Tell you what, they’re afraid to kill anybody white; it would lead to too big a bobbery.’

‘Looks like it,’ said Jack—though they were to find in time that Lew’s theory was very far from the truth! ‘What are they up to now?’

‘The crew are hooking it!’ returned Lew; and splash after splash told that the coolies were leaping into the river and making their escape.

The din on board the chop-boat was tremendous. The pirates were yelling like the fiends they looked; they were cutting, slashing, and thrusting at all who offered resistance, and two or three

were hacking madly with axes at the door of the great cabin. From somewhere towards the stern, the women were shrieking dismally.

'The women, Jack!' said Lew; and the two Scouts pulled with all their might towards the place whence the cries came.

They pulled up to a dimly lighted window on the river-side of the boat, and saw the three women in a small cabin. They had flung themselves down on a divan, and were bewailing their fate. Save for themselves, the place was empty; but at this moment the Scouts heard the doors of the main cabin driven in, and then there rang out the reports of pistols, and a still wilder uproar arose. The old military mandarin and some of his men were defending themselves, and for some moments the pirates would evidently be held at bay.

Jack swung up his sweep, and dashed in the broad, low window of the cabin. The women redoubled their cries. Jack hailed them in the local dialect.

'Do not fear!' he cried; 'we are friends. We have a sampan here to carry you off in safety. Come quickly!'

The first to answer to the appeal was the mandarin's wife. She came across the cabin, tottering on her tiny, compressed feet, each about half the size of Jack's fist, and glanced out. She

saw the sampan by the light which streamed through the broken window from the small lamp. She mistook the little boat for that which belonged to the big craft, and thought that the sailors had launched it. She proved herself a cool, clear-headed woman as soon as she saw a chance of escape. Scrambling through the window, she dropped into the sampan, calling on her maids to follow.

They did so; and just as Jack was thrusting off with his sweep, the cabin-door was broken open, and in burst a couple of pirates. The rascals gave a yell of rage at finding the cabin empty; then leapt across to the broken window. They stared out, but saw nothing of the sampan, for their eyes were fresh from the glaring light, and the little boat was slipping along the side of the vessel in the shade of the hull.

'They have leapt into the river!' shouted one of the rogues; while the other howled still louder at the thought of the rich booty they had missed; for the splendid jewels of pearl and jade with which the wife of a wealthy mandarin is adorned would have formed a great share of their loot.

'*Hi-yah!*' breathed the mandarin's wife. 'Pull, men—pull! Do not let these river-wolves seize us. We will drown ourselves first!'

'Fear nothing,' replied Jack; 'we will soon have you out of danger.'

The sampan now shot past the bows, and went at speed down-stream. They escaped unobserved, for the light of the flare was obscured by the great lateen-sail, which had been lowered forward; and down this lane of dusk the Scouts steered the sampan till they were well away from the vessel, where the hurly-burly of savage battle still raged.

'*Hi-yah!* Pao-Chu,' said one of the maids; 'it is by the favour of Heaven that we have escaped, for the boat was run on the mud-bank on purpose to give the river-wolves a chance to seize us.'

'How know you that?' asked her mistress, Pao-Chu, the Precious Pearl.

'I looked through the little window near the cabin-door, and saw Ho, the steersman, helping the robbers.'

'He shall be punished terribly,' said Precious Pearl. 'I will report his name to your master, who is a lion, and will certainly crush these wolves. He, doubtless, has sent these men to take us to a place of safety while he destroys the robbers.—Whither, men, do you carry us?'

'To the customs barrier at Ho-Chow,' replied Jack.

Precious Pearl was satisfied with this answer, and took no further notice of the oarsmen, whom

she believed to be a pair of coolies, and the darkness was too great for her to find out her mistake, as the night had again become overcast.

The mistress and maids, crouching in the stern, now began to talk together with the intimate freedom which exists between women of varying social ranks in China; and the sampan was driven forward at speed by a pair of perfectly silent rowers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MANDARIN YANG.

WITHIN less than an hour they rounded a bend, and saw, a quarter of a mile below, the many lamps of a river-side town, and heard, rolling across the water, the muffled tum-tum-tum of a drum beating steadily.

‘Police-boat,’ whispered Lew; and Jack nodded.

Precious Pearl, too, caught the rattle of the drum above her maids’ constant chatter, and bade the oarsmen row still faster to warn the police, so that the boat might proceed to the scene of the battle and help the honourable mandarin P’eng to secure the robbers. ♦

Every river-side town of China has its police-boat—usually a small sailing-sloop of some ten or twelve tons. It mounts a toy cannon on its fore-deck, but the cannon is never used. It slings a drum amidships, and this is steadily thumped all night by one or other of the crew. Whether this is done to terrify the thieves, or to warn them so as to save the police the trouble of catching them, no foreigner can ever make out; but there it is, and that is how they go on in that topsy-turvy country!

As the sampan was driven up to the side of the police-boat, the women began yelling in chorus to draw the attention of the police, and a row of heads was popped over the side.

Precious Pearl told their story on a high, screaming note, and when she paused for breath the maids filled the gaps in her narrative with ear-splitting shrieks. The police gabbled and shouted in excited response, until the quiet river rang again with the uproar, and people scrambled out of cabins and ran out of houses to discover what was the matter.

In the end the police-captain and six of his men got into a rowing-boat, which lay alongside, and escorted them to the Yamen of the mandarin who ruled Ho-Chow and the surrounding country.

The Yamen lay at the water-side, a little farther down the river, and had a small quay in front of it. They all landed on the quay, and the police-captain beat loudly on the closed gates of the long, low building. After a time the gates were opened by a porter, and they were admitted to the outer court of the governor's house. Here a few dim lamps were burning, and in this place they waited, as it seemed, for an endless time before they were summoned to the presence of Yang, the mandarin.

The women were very greatly surprised when they saw the Scouts. Deceived by the darkness

and Jack's perfect mastery of the local dialect, they had imagined that their helpers were a pair of coolies, and Jack had to enter on a long explanation of themselves and their presence. Precious Pearl and her maids had not ceased to wonder and chatter volubly, when a tall runner, a native policeman, came to lead them to appear before the governor.

They found him in an inner court, seated on his throne of justice, his rich robes of office hastily dragged on, and his cap a little awry, for he had been hastily summoned from a party where some rich merchants had been entertaining him with games of chance, at which they took good care to lose in order to gain his favour. Yang was a tall, thin, elderly man, with the dulled eyes and leaden-hued face of an opium smoker. He was perfectly listless, and heard the exciting story without moving a muscle of his features, which were covered with a skin like old parchment. He looked at Jack, and a gleam of recognition came into his eyes. He looked at Lew, and asked his name.

Jack knew the governor and spoke up, and said who Lew was. For the first time life and animation sprang into the cadaverous visage of Yang. His dull eyes flashed, and he devoured Lew with an eager gaze, in which burned a light as of fierce hatred.

'I knew not that he had a son,' murmured the

mandarin; then suddenly the light was quenched, and Yang's look became as listless as before.

He asked a number of questions, and the answers were taken down by his secretary. The questions were put to Jack, for Precious Pearl and her maids had been taken to the women's quarters; and Jack answered them promptly. The secretary seemed to write very slowly, and there were long intervals of silence, when Yang sat staring at the rings of jade-stone which adorned his yellow hands, with enormous curved nails almost as long as his fingers.

'Say, Jack,' whispered Lew, 'this is a pretty slow business. When are they going to whirl in and send a rescue-party?'

'It's about the usual style of movement,' murmured Jack in reply. 'Life or death, it's all one to them; they never hurry.'

Yang raised his head as the Scouts whispered together, and again the odd, savage look came into his slanting eyes as he looked at Lew. Then he returned once more to the contemplation of his jade-stones.

'The old chap doesn't seem to like the look of me,' whispered Lew. 'What's wrong with him? We've never had the pleasure of meeting before.'

'I don't know,' replied Jack; 'I think I've heard he's dead set against foreigners. Perhaps that's it.'

At last the examination came to an end, and the mandarin spoke a few words to the police-captain, who had stood calm and silent while the minutes steadily slipped away. The police-captain at once returned to his boat, and rowed back to the police-sloop to gather a band to go to the assistance of the assailed boat.

The boys were now free to depart, and Jack led the way from the Yamen. At the door of the hall Lew glanced back.

'The old corpse is galvanised into life again,' he remarked to Jack. The latter also glanced. The leaden, listless face of the mandarin had once more flashed into eager brightness. The dull eyes were filled with a savage shine as Yang looked after them, and he was whispering eagerly to the tall runner who had led them to the hall. At the next moment they had gained the outer court, and the mandarin and his follower were lost to view.

'Queer,' said Jack; 'they seem to be taking an uncommon interest in us. Old Yang knows me well enough; he used to be governor of Wushan, you know.'

'Was he?' said Lew.

'Yes,' replied Jack; 'but about two years ago he was drafted to Ho-Chow.'

'Is this a better job, then?' asked Lew.

'No; it was an Irishman's rise,' replied Jack.

'I expect they caught him up to something. He's got a jolly bad reputation, I know that.'

'Did you twig that runner he was talking to?' said Lew. 'The chap has only got one hand. His sleeve fell back once when he was leading us in, and I saw the right hand was gone; his arm was only a stump.'

'Very likely he'd had it cut off for thieving,' commented Jack. 'Heaps of them get punished in that fashion.'

'Say, that's a queer sort of party to make a bobby of,' chuckled Lew.

'Oh, he'd suit old Yang all the better!' replied Jack. 'I've heard Yang is no end of a thief himself.'

Five minutes spent in threading the dark and dirty lanes of Ho-Chow, under the guidance of Jack, brought the Boy Scouts to the *hong* which formed the Ho-Chow branch of Mr Burnet's business.

A *hong* is a walled compound which contains a set of one-storied buildings, divided from each other by courtyards. Within the boundary wall lie the 'go-downs,' the warehouses, the offices, and the residences of the owner and his servants.

The owner was here represented by his agent, Mr Mackenzie, a Scotsman, who had been long resident in China.

The gate of the *hong* was closed, as it had

been closed since sunset. But Jack beat upon it, and the noise fetched out the coolie who acted as porter from his mat shed, built against the compound wall just inside. The man knew Jack at once, and let the boys in, and the latter ran to the inner courtyard, where Mr Mackenzie's house stood. They found him smoking his last pipe before turning in, and he looked out some dry clothes for them, and listened to their story with deep interest.

'Ay, ay,' he remarked, 'you thievish rogues have turned up again, have they? Years ago there was a lot of piracy along the river; but things were quieter under the last man. He was as near being an honest man as ye can expect in a mandarin. But I've been looking for things to break out again; ay, I've expected it for months. This old Yang, ye see, our *tao-tai* [governor] is a rare man for rascals to thrive under. They've only to grease his palm for him to turn a blind eye on their doings.'

'Say, Mr Mackenzie!' cried the astonished Lew; 'you don't mean to say that the magistrate will let those pirates rob and murder people if they turn up some of the loot?'

'Do I not?' smiled Mackenzie, raising his grizzled eyebrows. 'But I do, my lad; I do. Yang doesn't believe there's any dirty money in the world—it's money, and that's enough for

him. And, mind ye, his coffers are still empty. He's been pretty careful since he came to Ho-Chow; he's not been too grasping, lest they should summon him to 'Pekin again.'

'He lost his place at Wushan for thieving, didn't he, Mr Mackenzie?' asked Jack.

'He did that,' replied the agent. 'He made enormous sums of money. He used to wink at gambling-houses, and take half the profits their owners made; then he would stir up strife between villages and set them fighting with each other, and then fine the head-men great sums for breaking the law; he sold his decisions in court openly to the highest bidder; he raked in the dollars by sackfuls, and at last went too far. He ran up against the foreign settlement, and got into trouble. Why, to be sure, it was your father who headed the attack on the old scamp,' and Mackenzie turned to Lew. 'Yer, it was Mr Standing who went to the viceroy and made things hot for Yang. He was summoned to Peking, and there they soon stripped him of the wealth he had stolen. I heard that it cost him forty thousand taels—an enormous sum of money—to save his head. But he bribed right and left, and just managed to come clear.'

'But how did he get another post as governor?' cried Lew.

'Oh, he belongs to an important family, and

his brother is a great officer of the Imperial Court,' replied the agent. 'So when things had blown over a little and the governorship of Ho-Chow fell empty, he was sent here.'

'I say!' cried Jack suddenly; 'I see now what old Yang meant. When I told him who Lew was, he looked at him in a jolly unfriendly style, and said half to himself that he didn't know somebody had a son. He meant Mr Standing. He seemed waxy with Lew because he was his father's son.'

'Let him be as waxy as he likes,' laughed Lew. 'I don't reckon he can do me much harm.'

Mr Mackenzie shook his head. 'I wouldn't be too sure of that, Lew,' he said quietly; 'a Chinese magistrate is a very awkward party to run up against if he means mischief. Within his own jurisdiction, you know, his power is absolute. My advice to you is to keep out of Yang's way; don't show yourself in Ho-Chow too much. It would be quite easy for him to make trouble. We have a very dangerous mob here in Ho-Chow—a very fanatical, anti-foreign mob; they will assail a "foreign-devil" on the smallest pretext, or, indeed, upon no pretext at all.'

Jack nodded. 'Have they been giving any trouble lately?' he asked.

'Ay, ay; they get out of hand a bit now and

again,' replied Mr Mackenzie. 'They're being stirred up against the missionaries. There's Mr Lowry, of the Wesleyan Mission, in bed at this very moment with three broken ribs and bruised from head to foot. They stoned him in an open space beyond the Street of the Shoemakers.'

'Who is stirring them up?' asked Jack.

'Outwardly the Buddhist priests,' replied Mr Mackenzie; 'but there's a bigger hand at the back. I think Yang is at work; he sends his runners to make mischief in the lowest quarters of the place. Then, ye see, the foreigners are glad to make him a present to get him to restore order.'

'I guess a Chinese mob can be a pretty hard lot, Mr Mackenzie?' said Lew.

The agent looked at Lew over his pipe. 'They can, my lad,' he replied. 'I hope and pray I may never see again what I saw in the Boxer rising a few years ago!'

At this moment the Chinese cook came in with the meal which Mr Mackenzie had ordered to be prepared for them, and when that was disposed of, Jack and Lew were glad to turn in, and soon lost all thought of their exciting evening in deep slumber.

CHAPTER V.

AH FOO THE WASHERMAN.

THE next morning the boys returned to Wushan in Mr Mackenzie's own express-boat. This was a long, slender rowing-boat, with a small cabin formed of mats for the passengers, and rowed by one large oar with a broad blade. The oar was propelled by Mr Mackenzie's boatman, Ching, and Lew watched Ching's performance with much amusement; for the morning was very hot, and Ching kept the sun's rays from his leathery complexion with a large paper parasol, which he held in his right hand.

There was not a breath of air, so Ching steadily fanned himself with a gaudily painted paper fan, which occupied his left hand. The labour of the oar was left to his dexterous feet, and he sat in the stern, a small oar placed beside him to steer with when necessary, and worked his strong legs in endless circles, and made the express-boat spin along at a fine pace.

• When they came to the creek where the sampan had foundered, Jack called on Ching to turn aside. A single glance told the boys that the sampan had gone.

'No more than I expected,' said Jack; 'there have been too many about here since daylight for it to be missed. It would be hauled up, patched, and carried off in no time.'

'What a pity!' said Lew. 'Hard luck, Jack! She was no end of a good little ship.'

'Things might have been a lot worse,' said Jack. 'We've lost the boat; but we're safe and sound ourselves, and that's the main thing.'

Ching did not understand a word they said, and they did not explain to him why they had turned aside to the creek.

As they rounded the next bend they looked eagerly to see if there were any signs of the battle, and saw signs enough in truth; for the fire-blackened hull of the house-boat lay on the mud-bank—a dismal sight in the bright sunshine. She had been set on fire, and had burned to the water's edge.

Ching now burst into a long account of the affair, for the news was known in every quarter of Ho-Chow, and had greatly excited the natives. For a long time there had been much piracy in a small way along the river; but never had the pirates flown at such high game as this, the floating home of a powerful mandarin.

Jack listened attentively for a time, then turned to Lew. 'By Jove, Lew, the old mandarin has disappeared! When the police got up, the

boat was burning like fury, and it seems certain that he and several of his men were killed, and their bodies destroyed in the fire. It's a tremendous business, and the river people are wild with excitement.'

'Will they catch the pirates?' asked Lew.

'It isn't likely,' said Jack. 'You see, they were masked pirates last night; to-day they're peaceful farmers, paddling about in the rice-fields, or watching the bullocks work the water-wheels. The only chance is to get one of the gang to give his comrades away; and that's a poor lookout for the police. The informer would be a dead man himself before long, and he wouldn't die by an easy death either.'

Ching landed the Scouts on the wharf outside Wushan, and the boys walked up to the gates, talking over their strange adventure of the previous evening.

'And you can't place the pirate captain yet, Jack?' asked Lew.

'No, that I can't,' answered Jack; 'and yet the ring of his voice hangs in my ears still.'

'Odd,' said Lew; 'and how strange it was when he shaped to cut you down, and then hung fire. Jack, he must have known you, and been unwilling to strike.'

'I wonder if that was it?' said Jack slowly. 'Do we know each other? Should I have

recognised the face if the mask had fallen off?'

'I thought at first,' went on Lew, 'that perhaps they would be unwilling to attack a white; but I don't now when I come to think it over. I guess that big old pirate was real flabbergasted when you looked over your shoulder at him, Jack.'

'And the second fellow, who chucked me overboard,' said the patrol-leader; 'that was a run go and no mistake! He dropped a spear to run in and lay hold of me. I saw him do it.'

'Seems to me you had friends among that gang,' chuckled Lew. 'That doesn't look over and above well for the leader of the Eagles.'

Jack laughed too. 'I give it up,' he said; 'perhaps we'll get at the truth some day. Now we'll talk of something else.'

But the subject had such fascination for Lew that he had got back to it by the time they were entering the walled compound in which his father's house stood. Jack turned in at the same gate, for their place was next door, and he could get over the garden-wall which divided the grounds of the two houses and take a short-cut home that way.

'Say, Jack,' burst out Lew, 'suppose that pirate captain was one of the coolies about your

settlement—perhaps a man working for your father or mine?’

‘We’ve got nothing but his size to go on,’ said Jack. ‘He was a thumping big chap; but, then, there are plenty of them in these parts. There’s one straight in front of us.’

Jack pointed to a very tall, broad-shouldered Chinaman walking towards the kitchen quarters of Lew’s home. He looked all the bigger because he was clad in long, flowing petticoats, spotlessly clean. He wore a broad-brimmed straw hat, from which a black queue hung to his knees, where it was neatly tied at the end with black points. The petticoats and the pigtail made him look like an immense woman—a giantess in a show. He carried a large basket in his hands.

Lew began to laugh. ‘What, old Ah Foo the washerman?’ he chuckled. ‘I don’t reckon Ah Foo would make a bully pirate. Why, he’s afraid of my Teddy pup! See how gently he’s walking, and how he twists his head and peeps round the corner. Teddy always goes for his pigtail. He thinks old Ah Foo wears it simply to tantalise him.’

Teddy was a small, plump, but very lively terrier, the pride of Lew’s heart. Lew had named him Teddy in honour of the famous ex-president, America’s national hero, and the little dog, as if aware of the honour, did his best to live up to

his name. He was always on the go, and always livening things up, and there was no one he livened up more than Ah Foo the washerman.

Suddenly Ah Foo began to scuttle. 'What's in the wind?' cried Lew. 'Ah Foo's cutting for his life.'

'Teddy in the offing somewhere,' said Jack.

Jack was right. There was a streak of white round an oleander bush, and Teddy, with yelps of joy, was after his prey. The huge Chinaman, his petticoats flapping about his legs, and flying from the little dog, presented a most comical picture, and the Scouts could not help laughing, even while they ran at full speed to rescue him from the pursuing Teddy.

The latter was soon up to Ah Foo, and began to make furious springs at the long pigtail, which went wiggle-waggle as the washerman ran, and excited Teddy as if it had been the tail of a big rat. The little dog was yelping and growling and tumbling over and over himself as he grabbed and snapped at the swinging tail.

'Say, I think I named him well,' laughed Lew as they ran. 'Teddy just about loves the strenuous life.'

At this moment the affair took a more comical turn still. Teddy got a mouthful of the pigtail, and hung on like grim death. Ah Foo swung

his head forward, and Teddy was jerked into the air; but he hung on just the same.

For about twenty yards Ah Foo scuttled along, while Teddy was sometimes going bump, bump along the ground, sometimes riding high in the air, but always sticking to the mouthful of pig-tail. Then the washerman caught the yells of the pursuing Scouts, and waited till they came up, and Lew took off his little dog—no easy matter, for Teddy's eyes were shining with the glow of battle, and his teeth were so firmly set in the tuft of coarse black hair that Lew had no simple task to get him to let go.

'I'm sorry, Ah Foo,' said Lew. 'We shall have to shut Teddy up when you come round with the clothes.'

'Alle rightee,' said Ah Foo, a bland smile dimpling across his broad face. 'Little dog not makee muchee harm. Not bitee me, only bitee hair.'

Ah Foo smiled still more broadly as Lew thrust his hand into his pouch and brought it out full of money, and handed it over. Lew had put a couple of handfuls of cash in his pouch, for possible small expenses on the way; and a gift of some forty of these brass coins, in universal use throughout China, pacified and delighted the washerman instantly. The total value of the gift was about a penny, as a

string of one thousand cash is worth just two shillings.

Ah Foo went on with his basket, and Lew, with Teddy yelping and struggling in his arms, turned towards a side-door.

‘So long, Jack,’ he said. ‘See you again this afternoon, eh?’

‘That’s it,’ replied Jack; ‘four o’clock at the back of our compound.’

CHAPTER VI.

THE EAGLE PATROL.

THERE was a meeting of the Eagle Patrol that afternoon, and at four o'clock six boys had assembled in the shed at the back of the Burnets' compound, the shed which Jack had secured as their clubroom and meeting-place. It was an empty storehouse, which Mr Burnet did not need, and it made a first-class den for the patrol.

They assembled in full marching kit, for they meant to go a long tramp in the cool of the evening to a village a few miles away, where there was a mission-station. The head of the station was a firm friend of theirs, and a great supporter of the Scout movement; he had been a Scout-master at home while on a long vacation, which he had been forced to take for the sake of his health.

The Eagles were six in number—Jack and Lew, two brothers named Tom and Dick Ward, Frank Murray, and Lo Yung, an almond-eyed, yellow-faced Scout, with a pigtail^{*} neatly coiled away under his broad-brimmed Scout's hat.

Lo Yung was a Chinese lad, but a British

subject. His father was a native of Hong-kong, and had come to Wushan as compradore for Mr. Burnet. A compradore is a native manager, and without the compradore many a big foreign business in China could not exist. As a class, compradores are most intelligent and trustworthy, and Lo Yung's father was one of the best of an excellent class.

Lo Yung was the smallest in the patrol, but no one except Jack could stand against him when it came to a trial of pure bodily strength. For the rest, he was a very quiet, even-tempered fellow, bubbling over with fun and good-nature, and a great favourite with his white companions.

When the patrol started, they crossed the river by the ferry-boat, rowed by two strong Tanka girls, and struck straight into the country beyond. Their way lay along the tiny paths which take the place of roads in China, for myriads of people in that country live and die without ever seeing a highway ten feet wide. Land is so precious that every inch possible is tilled, and only the narrowest strips are left for traffic. The real roads are the rivers, streams, and canals, which seam and cross the country in every direction, till a stretch of plain seen from a neighbouring eminence looks like a silver gridiron.

Here and there were the hamlets in which lived the farmers, the tillers of the soil, the

people who make every fertile inch of China bloom like a garden. In passing through the villages each Scout gripped his staff tight and kept a wary lookout. This was not because of the inhabitants, for everywhere they were greeted by broad and friendly smiles on the yellow faces; but because of the dogs.

'It's just the same everywhere,' laughed Jack Burnet; 'the dogs go for a white man at sight.'

'I thought of bringing my Teddy pup for a run,' said Lew; 'but I guess it wouldn't be very healthy for him.'

'Not it,' said Jack; 'you would have to carry him all the way. The dogs would set on him all together; they will at once kill a strange dog which strays from another village.'

'At that rate, Teddy's safest inside the compound wall,' remarked Lew.

At a small village, beside a creek which they crossed on their journey, the Scouts had a chance of doing a good turn, and they went at it with the heartiest goodwill.

A junk had become stranded owing to a slight fall in the depth of water in the creek, and the crew and the men of the hamlet were tugging with all their might at a cable to haul the vessel off the mud-bank.

The Eagles at once added their strength to that of the pulling, shouting crowd, and after

about twenty minutes' hard work, the vessel began to move, inch by inch, and at length glided into water which would float her.

The Chinese were delighted with the help which the boys had given, and thanked them again and again before the patrol went on its way.

'What merry, jolly people these are!' said Lew to Jack.

'The Chinaman is full of fun and good-humour, taking him in a general way,' replied Jack; 'and he is a very cheerful, good-natured fellow under circumstances when a white man would grumble for all he is worth. But there's another side to him when he's roused, I can tell you—a very dangerous side. You would hardly believe it, perhaps, but those people we've just left were all Boxers, so father says.'

'Boxers!' cried Lew. 'But I thought the Boxers were frightful brutes, who tortured and murdered people!'

'That's what they did, and no mistake!' replied Jack.

'Then this merriment and good-nature are all put on?' said Lew.

'Not at all,' returned Jack. 'It is genuine enough; but so is the terrible cruelty they can show when they are stirred up and that side of them comes out.'

Shortly after leaving the village where they had done a good turn, the road began to ascend, and for a couple of miles the Scouts climbed a broken, narrow way, which led them up to a lofty plateau dotted with hill-villages.

'There's Mr Martyn's place,' cried Jack, pointing to a good-sized white house almost hidden in a clump of tall trees, and every Scout pressed forward at a swifter pace still, now that their journey's end was in sight. They were within a few hundred yards of the place, when a band of a dozen men came out of a narrow side-track and hurried towards them. The men were Yamen runners, and the Scouts stood aside to let the police pass. Amid the runners were two captives, who were being hauled along by their pigtails, and were receiving many blows and kicks as they were dragged towards the distant Yamen and prison. The men were well-dressed, and looked like persons of consequence; and their broad, honest faces offered the strongest contrast to the villainous air of the policemen who were ill-treating them. As a rule, Yamen runners are recruited from the scum of the city over which a mandarin rules. They receive no pay. Nay, more, under a grasping magistrate they purchase the privilege of serving him, and recoup themselves by demanding bribes from suitors, taking money from thieves and evil-doers to let them

escape, and squeezing payments from all and sundry who fall into their rascally hands.

'Say, Jack,' murmured the corporal of the Eagles, 'the prisoners look like the honest men this time, and the bobbies look like rogues all over.'

'That's just what it is, I expect,' replied the patrol-leader; 'if old Yang isn't trying a squeeze on those farmers, I'm very much mistaken.'

'Are we in old Yang's district?' asked Lew.

'Been in it for more than two miles,' returned Jack. 'The border-line between his district and that we live in runs just beside the place where we helped the people to haul the junk off the mud.'

'Why—yes,' said Lew. 'Look at that long chap in front; it's the one-handed runner.'

The big runner was in charge of the party, and seemed intent on nothing but getting his captives forward towards the distant Yamen in Ho-Chow. But when he had turned the next bend of the way, he seemed inclined to pay more attention to the Scouts, who had again resumed their march. He halted his gang, called three or four of them around him, and conversed with them in low tones. Finally one was detached to follow the Eagles, and bring word of their halting-place to the next village, where the runners would await his return.

Meanwhile the Scouts were swinging swiftly up to Mr Martyn's house. As they approached, they raised the cry of the patrol, and to their surprise were answered by loud cries of joy from within, and saw Mr Martyn, followed by two or three ladies, rush out to meet them. The Scouts had expected to be received in friendly fashion, but this burst of frenzied delight on seeing them was a trifle of a puzzle. It was soon explained.

'My word, Scouts, I'm glad to see you!' cried Mr Martyn. 'You're just the fellows we want.'

'What's wrong, Mr Martyn?' cried Jack.

'The Brethren are on the war-path,' replied Mr Martyn, 'and they've attacked our station in the hills and burned it to the ground. Miss Lee and Miss Robins were staying there, and had the narrowest of escapes. If a friendly villager had not warned them, they would have fallen into the hands of that bloodthirsty crew. As it is, the Brethren only found old Kuo and his wife there; but they killed the poor old people out of hand.'

'Jack whistled, and looked very grave. 'When was it?' he asked.

'Early this morning,' replied Mr Martyn. 'The ladies fled into the gorge at the back of the ridge, and hid there for hours. When they crept out they luckily met a friendly native, who

brought them down here, and they arrived not an hour ago.'

'You're in great danger here,' said Jack, as he glanced up the hill-road.

'We are,' agreed Mr Martyn, 'and we have looked up that road a hundred times in the last hour, Jack. Thank Heaven, you fellows have come to lend a hand. We can't take the road to-night, for Miss Lee and Miss Robins are utterly exhausted; but with the peep of day, if we're safe till then, I'll get everybody down to Wushan.'

'Good,' said Jack; 'we'll stand on guard to-night, and escort you down to-morrow. How many were there in the band?'

'At least fifty, according to the statement of the man who guided the ladies here,' replied Mr Martyn. 'It appears the main body of the Brethren has marched to attack Pa-li, a walled town on the other side of the hills. It is said there is a great store of arms there, and they mean to seize them and raid the country all that way. This lot that run across our station must be a wandering band of the society.'

'Father was saying the other day that things looked very bad,' said Jack. 'He had a merchant to see him who had come from beyond Pa-li, and the man said that the Brethren were certain to break out before long.'

China is a land honeycombed with secret societies, and of late years these societies have very often taken a revolutionary and destructive turn. The most famous example of these is, of course, the Society of Allied Fists, as the Chinese called it, better known as the Boxers, whose members organised the terrible anti-foreign riots and rising of 1900. But this society was but one among many such revolutionary bands, and in the neighbourhood of Wushan there had existed for many years a society whose Chinese name meant Harmonious Brethren. Among the members of the foreign settlements they were known as the Brethren, and for a long time they were little regarded; the aims of the Harmonious Brethren were perfectly peaceful. It was a religious society, whose object was the building and repair of temples throughout the district. But after the Boxer rising, its character slowly changed. A number of fanatical leaders sprang into authority; and as time went on, the Brethren became known as people who hated 'foreign devils,' and, above all, missionaries. Rumour after rumour ran through the country that the Brethren meant to rise and sweep the foreigners out of that part of China; but the rumours had so often proved groundless that many people had come to look upon the talk as idle boasting, and to believe that after the

severe lesson the Boxers had received no other society would dare to give trouble. Now it seemed that the Brethren were about to prove the truth of the rumour which had been laughed at.

A few miles from the mission-station where Mr Martyn and his wife lived, there was a bungalow among the hills. The people of the mission used this bungalow as a place of resort in the very hot weather, for it stood high and cool. It was also a centre of Christian teaching, and was in charge of a native Christian teacher, an old Chinaman named Kuo, and his wife. The two English ladies had gone up to stay for a week or so with the old people, to obtain a change from the great heat of the lower station. The bungalow was now a heap of ashes, and the Chinese evangelists had been murdered by the fierce Brethren.

CHAPTER VII.

A DISTURBED WATCH.

THE first part of the night passed quietly. The Scouts had pitched their camp, as they intended, in an open space behind Mr Martyn's house. The latter had no compound wall, for this part of the country had hitherto been so peaceful that no provision had been made for defence. The house was a large square building, where a retired merchant had once lived, and had been purchased from his son, upon the merchant's death, for mission use. Behind the house was a good-sized garden, surrounded by a bamboo fence, and the camp had been made in the garden.

The Scouts had been feasted royally after their long tramp, and now, stretched on the warm, dry ground, all slept, save Jack, who was standing on guard. The house was quiet, for all there were wrapped in slumber, confident in the watch the Eagles would keep against the possible marauders. Jack took a turn about the place, and then returned to the spot where his comrades slept, under the two flags which the patrol always carried and set up at the halting-place—the Union-jack of Britain and the Stars and Stripes

of the United States of America, the emblems of the two great kindred races represented in the patrol; for not only was Lew an American, but so was Frank Murray as well.

As Jack came up with soft step, one of the figures moved, turned over, and sat up.

'Hello, Jack!' said Lew, rubbing his eyes and speaking in a low voice. 'What time is it?'

'Half-past two,' replied Jack; 'you don't come on duty for half-an-hour yet.'

'That's all right,' murmured Lew, springing to his feet. 'I'll bet I sha'n't sleep any more now I've wakened. All quiet?'

'All quiet,' replied Jack.

'Say,' breathed Lew in a deep whisper, 'isn't it wonderful to think how we've turned up here in the very nick of time?'

'Yes,' replied Jack, 'it would have been an anxious night for Mr Martyn if we hadn't appeared.'

'D'ye think it was right to stop, Jack?' asked Lew. 'Seemed to me as if we ought to have taken the back track at once.'

'No, no, Lew,' said the patrol-leader. 'He was quite right. You never know where these fellows may spring from; and if we'd been attacked by night, it might easily have been a frightful business. Keep under shelter till daylight; that's the best plan, by a long chalk.'

'Well,' said Lew, 'you know the country and the people better than I do. You're sure to be right. Hello! what's that?'

They had been speaking very softly together, and both had heard distinctly a faint cracking noise at the far corner of the garden. At the next instant the two Scouts were gliding without a sound towards the spot. Jack knew every inch of the place, and under his guidance they gained the cover of a large bush and peeped round it. Some one outside was trying to displace a portion of the fence by wrenching the bamboo uprights from the ground. The attempt was successful, for the Scouts saw a gap appear in the dark line of the fence. There was no moon, but the night was clear and starlit, and they plainly saw two figures creep into the garden and move slowly, silently, and cautiously along a path towards the camp where the Scouts lay in deep slumber. A third figure appeared at the gap, but did not follow his companions.

'Back!' snapped Jack; and they flew for the camp. The patrol-leader drew his whistle, but did not blow it at once. He was unwilling to terrify the ladies in the house with a sound of alarm, unless it should prove absolutely necessary, and he and Lew raced back to place themselves in the way of the intruders.

'The Brethren?' breathed Lew.

'Never!' breathed Jack in return; 'they'd come with a hullabaloo. Rum go, this.'

They gained the spot where their comrades slept, and posted themselves under cover of a thick-growing shrub. The question now was whether the intruders had heard them moving—though they had trodden as silently as possible on a grassy border—or no. Jack raised his staff and pointed. He was pointing to a dark, narrow gap, where the path ran into the open space in which the camp was pitched, and at the next instant a figure, creeping along the ground like a snake, came out of the shadow and crawled towards the sleeping Scouts. At his heels came a second, and their course was laid to pass the bush behind which the Scouts on guard were crouching.

Without a sound, Jack passed his staff into the hands of his comrade; then licked his palms to get a good grip, and held them ready to grab. A head came in sight, a shaven head, from which a black snake seemed to be hanging. The snake was the intruder's pigtail, a long, stout braid of black hair. Upon this Jack pounced, caught it in both hands, and gave a tremendous tug which wrenched the man's head half-round on his shoulders. At the same moment Jack growled a fierce '*Hi-yah!*' and followed up his first tug with a second savage haul at the cable of hair.

The crawling Chinaman let out a wild howl of

pain and affright, and upon that yell the Scouts awoke and were up in an instant.

'On guard, Scouts!' cried Jack; and was obeyed with a promptness which showed that 'Be Prepared' was a motto thoroughly ground into the Eagles. Each caught up his staff and raced towards the house. In case of alarm every one knew his duty, and now all hastened to do it.

Meanwhile the Chinaman whose scalp had been handled in so rude a fashion had leapt to his feet, and started to scuttle at the best speed he could make down the path towards the gap at which he had entered the garden. Jack hung on to the pigtail, but the man was of such size and strength that the patrol-leader was hauled along, and with a tremendous kick at his captive Jack at last let him go. The second intruder had also seen trouble; for as he sprang to his feet to escape, Lew had slipped round the bush and thrust his staff between the fugitive's legs and tripped him up, sending him sprawling on his face. Then as he scrambled to his feet, the heavy staff had been brought across his shoulders with a rousing thwack, and he had taken one or two bruises with him for a certainty. Lew sprang out to fetch another blow at the bundling figure, but Jack snapped out, 'Hold hard!' and the corporal pulled up dead, and began to chuckle.

'Say, Jack,' he murmured, 'we frightened them

good and well. I reckon they were sneak thieves, crawling in to bag anything they could find lying around.'

'No,' said Jack, slowly; 'I don't fancy so. They were runners, Lew.'

'Runners!' said Lew in tones of deep surprise. 'Bobbies! What did they want to come in that style for?'

'Don't know,' returned Jack; 'but I'm quite sure they were runners. They had stripped off their tunics and glazed hats, but their breeches and leggings gave them away.'

'Could they have come from that lot we saw on the road?' asked Lew.

'Might have done,' returned Jack.

'But what for?' persisted Lew.

Jack shook his head. No one could be expected to answer for the motives of the runners of the court of the mandarin Yang; the only thing any one could be certain of was that the motives were not good.

'We've got nothing worth their stealing,' went on Lew. 'The lowest class of thieves will steal the most wretched trifles, so father says; but I thought runners wanted something worth pocketing, not odds and ends.'

'Queer business,' said Jack, returning towards the house. Here he found the Eagles at their post. It had been arranged that if an alarm was

raised, the patrol should guard the doors of the house until further orders were received. There were two doors, and so at each entrance a couple of Scouts were now on guard, staves at the ready, and eyes and ears wide open for sound of danger.

Jack drew them together, and told them what had happened. He spoke in low tones, for no one in the house had been roused, and there seemed no need to disturb them.

'No. 3 and No. 4 will remain on guard at the doors,' said Jack. 'No. 5 and No. 6 will come with us to patrol round the house and see if any more of these fellows are lurking about.'

No. 3 and No. 4 were Tom and Dick Ward. They returned at once to their posts at the doors, and the other four marched upon their search. They went first to the gap which had been torn in the garden fence, and examined the neighbourhood thoroughly, driving their staves into bushes and exploring every corner, and taking care all the time to keep close together, and support each other. In this way they worked right round the house, but there was no sign of the runners; the silence of the summer night was unbroken, and the road and garden appeared to be completely deserted.

The patrol gathered in front of the house, and discussed the situation in low tones. No one

was willing to return to his interrupted sleep, and they agreed to watch till the first glimpse of dawn appeared in the east, when they were to arouse Mr Martyn and the household.

Suddenly there came to their ears a low, rolling, muffled sound. All became perfectly silent, and listened with all their might. Very faint and far off was the noise; but Jack knew it, and murmured, 'Drums!'

'Yes,' whispered Lew; 'the beating of drums. Say, Jack, what does it mean?' The patrol waited eagerly for their leader's reply.

Jack shook his head. 'Hard to be sure—at once,' he said. 'It may be a festival at a village up among the hills. If they've got a big theatre show on, the drums will sometimes be going before daylight, or it may be the Brethren on the march.'

He was silent for a few seconds; then he gave his orders. 'Stand here on guard, Eagles.—And No. 3, you whistle if you scent danger.—Lew, you come with me, and we'll go as far as the ridge. We can hear much better there, and find whether the drums are moving this way or not.'

About five hundred yards to the west of Mr Martyn's house the ground rose steeply to a small rocky ridge, and the sound was coming to them over this ridge from the upland country beyond. Away went Jack and Lew; and No. 3, Tom

Ward, drew his whistle, held it ready in his hand, and posted himself at a corner where he could catch the first sign or sound of any one moving about the house. The other Scouts remained at the doors, every sense on the alert, their staves gripped tightly in their clenched hands; it would be a cunning enemy which marched undiscovered on the Eagles.

‘Keep close behind me, Lew,’ said Jack. ‘I know a path which will take us right up to the ridge. If the drums are coming this way, we’ll wake the Martyns up and be off. The day isn’t far off now, and we shall soon have enough light to be sure we don’t fall into an ambush.’

‘Right,’ said Lew; and they swung into Scouts’ pace along a narrow path running through a field of grain.

But they never reached the ridge—indeed, they were barely a hundred yards from the house, when the journey was interrupted in strange fashion.

There was a rustle amid the tall stems of the grain, and Jack turned on his heel to see what it meant. He saw three dark figures leap upon them, and heard a voice cry out, low and swift, in the local dialect, ‘The one who follows! The one who follows!’

He knew at once they were enemies, and

landed a sweeping blow at the leader. It was caught and parried by a heavy stick, and for a few seconds Jack and his opponent struck fiercely at each other, Jack landing one or two shrewd hits, and getting a rousing crack across the forearm for himself. Then the man turned and darted away through the corn.

Where was Lew! There was no sign of him, and Jack sprang to pursue the men who had seized and were carrying off his friend. Suddenly he pulled up dead. He knew the difficulty of tracking through tall grain by daylight, and by night it would be almost impossible. He could hear plainly the rustle of their movements, but that would not guide him closely enough. Instead of pushing on their track, he collected himself, with a tremendous effort, and thought instead. He would now have been helpless had he not, true to a Scout's training, carried in his mind a picture of the country around Mr Martyn's house. He remembered that the farther side of the field of grain was bounded by a deep, wide ditch filled with water, and towards this ditch Lew was being dragged. At the lower corner of the field this ditch was crossed by a single broad plank, which led to a path running down to a small hamlet below the mission-house.

'They're making for the plank,' thought Jack, and raced back at top speed along the path. At

the end of the field, he turned and hurried along its lower border, and in a few moments he gained the plank, darted swiftly across it, and sprang into the ambush provided for him by a growth of bamboo on the farther bank. He was easily first at the place; for though he had come right round two sides of the field, he had moved at speed in the open, while the captors of Lew had pushed their way slowly through the grain, encumbered with their struggling captive.

In a few moments they appeared, a dark cluster at the other end of the plank. Jack gripped his stout stick and awaited them. He now stood in a position of great advantage, for they did not dream of his presence on the other bank. They had heard no sounds of pursuit through the corn, and believed that the leading Scout had fled in terror from this strange, sudden assault. They could not have divined in any way that he had rushed to place himself in a tremendously strong position; but they were soon to learn of it.

In the bright starlight Jack could see his enemies clearly; they were three tall, powerful fellows. Two carried Lew between them, and they shuffled swiftly across the plank; the third followed leisurely. Jack resolved to take the third man first, and clear him out of the way. This he did in a very effective fashion. He laid



Sep' hoo spinning off the plank.

his staff before him, like a lance in rest, darted out, and drove the stout pole with all his weight and strength right into the fellow's midriff, and sent him spinning off the plank, landing him, with a terrific splash, right into the middle of the deep, water-filled trench. Then he turned on the others.

As he did so, he growled, '*Hi-yah!* Come on! come on, all of you, we have them now!' These words he uttered in Chinese, and sprang forward to strike at the men who held Lew. There was no one to strike at, the men were off like hares before a greyhound. They had seen their companion hurled into the water like a stone shot from a catapult; they had heard their assailant summoning a band of people to his aid, and they promptly dropped their captive and fled, with thought save for their own skins.

Jack sprang to Lew's side, and found him rising to his feet. He wondered at Lew's silence, or, rather, that his comrade could only make a grunting noise through his nose, and he put his hand to Lew's face, a bandage of cotton-cloth was tied tightly round his mouth. Lew was gagged. A cautious stroke with a knife freed the corporal's lips, and Jack said anxiously, 'Have they hurt you, Lew?'

'Not a bit,' replied No. 2. 'Only tied my mouth up and lugged me through the corn.'

'Who are they?' cried Jack.

At that instant the man who had been wallowing and blowing in the water gained the bank and crawled out, the water streaming and squashing from him.

'I'll have a look at this chap,' said Jack, and sprang to seize him. The man thrust out an arm to fend the patrol-leader off. Jack seized the wrist and held on. With a tremendous jerk, the man snatched his arm away. The wet slippery wrist slid through Jack's fingers; but he tightened his clutch, expecting to get a better hold when the man's hand came up against his groin. To his astonishment, the wrist shot out of his grasp and was gone. It was a mere stump; there was no hand to it. The man ran off as fast as he was free, and Jack did not follow. Other things were in the wind to-night, and it was best to get back to his comrades.

'This way, Lew,' he murmured; and they ran back across the plank, along the edge of the corn, and regained the path. Jack at once turned back to Mr Martyn's house, and Lew followed closely. They kept a sharp eye open, but saw no further sign of danger.

When they came to the open land surrounding the mission-house, Lew ranged up alongside and blew out a long breath.

'Say, Jack, that was a funny business,' he

murmured. 'Those fellows had hold of me before you could say "Knife!" and they were jolly strong chaps. They gripped me in a queer style, too; there was a trick about it. They didn't hurt me fortunately, but I felt helpless as soon as I was in their hands. Were they thieves, or did they lay hold of me in mistake for somebody else?'

'The chap I went for hadn't got a hand at the end of the arm I laid hold of!' said Jack.

'No hand!' cried Lew. 'That looks like a thief who had been caught.'

'Looks jolly well like the one-handed runner we saw on the road last night,' said Jack; 'these were runners who had hold of you. That is a runner's trick.'

'Looks like a mistake, then,' said Lew. 'did they suppose I was?'

'I don't see my way through it yet,' said Jack; 'but there's something odd behind this. We'll get back to the patrol, and stick there.'

Jack was immensely puzzled by the affair. He did not think the runners had made any mistake, for they had certainly been recognised, and Lew pointed out. This was shown by the cry of the leader calling to his men, 'The one who follows!' This had been Lew, and the leader had been the one-armed runner from Yang's Yamen. But at this moment all thought of this curious little

adventure was put to flight by a renewed outburst of the rolling of the drums.

For some time the drums had been silent, but now their deep, hollow notes rolled along the silent country, and were nearer, much nearer. The men who beat and marched behind them were drawing towards the mission-house, and there could be little doubt that the Brethren were approaching.

Jack and his comrade ran up to the house, to find that Mr Martyn had come out and was listening to the roll of the drums.

'They are coming, Jack,' he said.
'No mistake about it, Mr Martyn,' replied the comrade. 'They are on the hill-path. It will be quiet on the road to Wushan. Best to hit the track and get off at once. Day will soon break, and then we can get on quickly.'

Mr Martyn was of the same opinion, and hasty preparations were made for the flight down to Wushan. In the midst of these, Jack was summoned by No. 4, who reported that a Chinaman had come to the house and wished to speak with them. Jack went out to see who was there, and found it was the head-man of the hamlet near at hand; his name was Lo-Fen, and he was a Christian; in fact, the hamlet was largely formed by several families of native

Christians. Mr Martyn came at the next moment, and the situation was swiftly discussed. Lo-Fen and his friends had heard the roll of the drums, and wished to take refuge in the mission; but when he heard that the people of the mission were about to start for Wushan, he said that it would be best for the Christian Chinese to fly to the hills until the Brethren had departed, and he went away to collect his friends and escape from the murderous mob now on their way to attack the mission-station.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRETHREN.

SCARCELY had Lo-Fen gone, than Lew rushed up with a report that a single drum was being beaten on the road to the south. This was the road to Wushan, and the news was very serious. Mr Martyn, Jack, and Lew ran out to the front of the house to listen. A mile away down the W road one large drum was being beaten at its heaviest heavy droning note travelling far and what dead silence on the edge of dawn. The drum stopped, and out burst at once the sound of drums from the north. The situation was terribly simple to understand. The mission was beset north and south; other road there was none, only difficult and tortuous field-paths, where their progress would be very slow and their enemies could easily assail them.

Jack whistled. 'No use to think of a start now, Mr Martyn. Best plan for us to stick in the shelter of the house. Lucky it's a pretty strong one.'

'I wonder if I've done wrong in delaying,' said Mr Martyn anxiously. 'Ought we to have started and made a dash through the night?'

'I don't think so,' said Jack, shaking his head. 'You see, we don't know how long those fellows to the south have been posted on our track, and if we'd run against them in the dark'—— Jack stopped, and shrugged his shoulders.

Mr Martyn nodded. Yes; it would have been a terribly hopeless business to encounter the long, keen pikes and heavy swords of a band of fanatics, whose assault would have been covered by the dusk of night.

'But there's one thing we must do at once,' went on Jack, 'and that is, get word of our fix down to Wushan.'

'How?' said Mr Martyn.

'Send a Scout,' replied Jack promptly. 'I've got just the man to detail for. There's Lo Yung. Can you find him : rig, Mr Martyn?'

'Easily,' said Mr Martyn; 'there are plenty of Chinese clothes about the place. We all wear them, you know, when we go up country.'

Jack at once summoned Lo Yung, and directed him to proceed to Wushan and inform their friends that the mission people and the Eagles were threatened by a dangerous and fanatical mob which was out for blood and plunder. Jack knew that the governor of Wushan would be appealed to at once for an officer and soldiers to proceed to their rescue. Lo Yung saluted, and at

once changed his uniform—which might have attracted dangerous notice—for the Chinese clothes which Mr Martyn found for him. Then he let down his pigtail, took a fan instead of his staff, and slipped away into the darkness. He knew the road well, and Jack had no fear that he would fail.

There was now only one thing to be done, to hold the mission-station against the riotous mob until help should arrive.

Fortunately the house, as Jack had said, was a strong one, and not easy to assail. It consisted of one main building, from which two wings ran; from end to end of the wings a strong wall had been built, and thus a small courtyard was formed. Every window looked into the courtyard. The three outside faces of the house and the boundary wall were solid blank wall. The boundary wall of the courtyard was pierced by two doorways, one wide and one narrow, and these were the only entrances to the place. Both were furnished with heavy doors, and the scouts now made haste to secure these doors with the heavy bolts and bars with which they were fitted. There was a well in the courtyard, so that the inhabitants could not be cut off from water, and in a short time they had barricaded themselves in the tiny fortress, which they saw they must hold against the Brethren.

The day had broken by the time that the first of their enemies arrived before the mission-station. The band from the north appeared, beating drums, yelling madly at sight of the white building, and rushing wildly across the open space to assail the doors and beat them in with axes. In their midst they bore terrible trophies of their assault on the hill bungalow—the heads of their victims, which had been struck off and set on spears.

As the axes crashed on the stout planks of the doors the Scouts sprang into action. This assault had been foreseen and prepared for. The masonry wall was about ten feet high, and it was broad and flat. The Scouts had found ladders in an outhouse, and these had been placed against the wall, one at each door. The rockery in the courtyard, and the heavy round its base had been torn away and hauled up the ladders and placed on the top of the wall. Now Jack leapt up one ladder, Lew up the other, and peered cautiously over the wall.

It was an ugly sight which met their gaze. A mob of fully sixty or seventy wild fanatics was thronging below the wall, and the sound of their furious yells and outcries rose as from a den of wild beasts. Every man was armed, even if it was only with a heavy club, but for the most part the weapons were of a terribly dangerous

sort. Some carried axes, some swords, but many were furnished with those pikes rarely seen out of China—long, slender poles fitted with most murderous blades, the latter of many patterns. Some of the pikes ended with simple spear-points, but other pike-heads were formed of broad, scythe-shaped sweeps of steel, or tridents studded with horrid barbs or hooks, with which an enemy's body might be dragged within reach of sword or dagger. The axemen had sprung to the front, and were assailing the doors with all their might.

But Jack, a huge, brawny fellow, naked to the waist, was launching furious blows on the mob. His shaven head shining in the morning light, his long pigtail swinging and jerking in with the violent motions of his body. He picked up a stone, weighing fully thirty pounds, and hurled it square on the naked skull. The stone landed with a dull thud, and the axeman went down as if he had been hit by a thunderbolt. At the same instant and in the same fashion, Lew felled the leader of the assault on the other door, and Mr Martyn, who was standing on the ladder behind Jack, fired his revolver over the heads of the mob.

The Brethren gave way at once; the crack of the revolver was little to their taste, for they had a great dread of a white man's firearms. They

rushed back, dragging their stunned and senseless comrades with them, and gathered in a chattering, howling crowd forty yards away. Then two of their number ran away at full speed along the road which led to the south, and the rest went on gabbling noisily, till a man, who seemed to be their leader, called out an order. It was obeyed at once, and away they all trooped, save three or four left on the watch, towards the native hamlet below the mission.

'Did you hear what he said, Jack?' murmured Mr. Martyn. He and Jack were watching the enemy over the wall.

Jack nodded. 'The brutes are going to murder and burn the place,' said the patrol-leader. 'It's a good job Lo-Fen has shifted his people.'

They watched anxiously for some time. They could see nothing of the rioters' movements, for the hamlet was hidden by a grove of banyan-trees; but ere long they saw a great cloud of smoke roll up beyond the grove and heard the outcries of the mob as the ruffians destroyed the houses of the native Christians.

An hour passed, and then Lew's quick eye caught a movement on the southern road.

'I can see people coming up the road,' he cried. 'There they are, a whole lot of them, passing that clump of bamboos at the end of that big rice-field.'

‘I see them,’ said Jack.

‘Are they friends?’ cried Mr Martyn. ‘Is it possible help has come up already from Wushan?’

Jack shook his head. ‘No chance of that,’ he replied soberly. ‘We can’t expect any one for hours yet; you know in what fashion the mandarin and his people will move, if our people get ’em to move at all. No; that’s another band of these confounded Brethren.’

‘Think so, Jack?’ cried Lew.

‘I’m sure of it,’ replied his comrade. ‘They’re armed, for you can see their weapons shining at this distance; but they mean mischief for us, and not help.’

Jack proved to be right. Within twenty minutes a fresh band of the fanatics appeared upon the scene; not so numerous as the first, but containing men of greater authority, as was soon perceived by the besieged.

The second band had one large drum, and this was beaten loudly. It was a signal to assemble, and the plunderers of the hamlet were seen running swiftly to the spot and gathering, with many motions of respect, around the new-comers. Mr Martyn fetched a pair of field-glasses and surveyed the crowd. He handed the glasses to Jack.

‘What do you make of a couple of men standing quietly in the middle, men who seem to be receiving reports?’ he asked.

Jack took a good look at the excited, shouting, gesticulating mob.

'Priests!' said Jack; 'not a sign of a pigtail between them;' and he handed the glasses back, and glanced over his shoulder to the courtyard where Lew was summoning them to breakfast. The ladies had made breakfast ready, for not a Chinese servant was left about the place; they had fled the day before as soon as the first reports of the outbreak had been received. The patrol were going to breakfast in two divisions. Lew had just been with No. 3 and No. 4; the others were going now.

Jack looked at the noisy crowd, and prepared to go down. 'They won't do anything just yet,' he remarked; 'there'll be a lot more jabbering before they have another go at us. May as well have some breakfast.'

'Of course, Jack; of course,' said Mr Martyn. 'Do you think they'll try their luck at another assault?'

'It's very likely,' replied the patrol-leader. 'I feel pretty sure the leaders will work 'em up to it; but you know how they go on, Mr Martyn—a lot of talk and then a savage rush; and it can be jolly savage, too,' added the Scout quietly. 'They've got heaps of pluck when they launch a real attack.'

Mr Martyn nodded soberly, for he knew the

Chinese of that district as well as Jack, who had grown up among them, and recognised that they were facing a very real and dreadful danger.

Jack had just finished his breakfast, when he heard a loud cry in the courtyard without. He rushed out, to see a round object rolling over the flags; it stopped near his feet, and he gazed at it in horror. It was a head, and he knew the face. The Brethren had murdered Lo-Fen, the head-man of the hamlet, and hurled his head in among the besieged to strike terror into them. They learned afterwards that the old head-man had lingered in the neighbourhood to watch over his own and his neighbours' property, and had been discovered, seized, and killed.

It was Lew who had given the cry, for he had been on the watch and had seen the rioter creep up with the dreadful signal of their cruelty in his hands.

'I saw a fellow creeping slowly up to us under cover of the garden fence,' said Lew, 'and I watched him to see what he was after, ready to give the alarm at any moment. But he was quite alone, and then I saw he was swinging something in his hand. He raised it, and I could see he was carrying a Chinaman's head by the pig-tail. He swung it two or three times to get a bit of power behind it, and then he whirled it clean over my head into the courtyard and ran away.'

'They're coming,' said Jack; 'that's to give us a hint of what they mean for us.' He sprang up to the wall again, and saw that the Brethren were moving once more to the assault. They now came on in dreadful silence; they had resumed their Chinese impassivity, that deadly calm more threatening than any uproar, and the front rank seemed to have laid down their weapons. At the next moment it was seen that their hands were full of stones, and when they came within thirty yards of the wall they loosed a tremendous shower of missiles. Nearer and nearer they drew, and thicker and thicker flew the rocks and heavy pebbles, dozens of them skimming just over the top of the wall and landing in the courtyard. So close and heavy was the pelt that to raise a hand above the wall would have been to be struck; to raise a head would have meant being stunned.

It was clever* strategy. The stone-throwers kept the top of the wall clear, and they halted at ten yards distance and maintained their fusillade with unbroken fury. The Scouts, lying close under the wall inside to avoid the hail which fell in the courtyard, expected the shower to slacken when the throwers had emptied their hands;* but it did not. Thirty or forty nimble fellows were racing to and fro, fetching fresh supplies, which they carried in the folds of their garments. At

a short distance there was the dried bed of a brook. In the rainy season a foaming torrent roared past the mission-house, but now the boulders shone white in the summer sun, and the bed was one mass of water-worn stones, the very ammunition for such an attack as was now being delivered.

It was Lew who divined this. 'Say, Jack,' he murmured, 'they keep the stones going good and steady. I'll bet they've got some fellows hauling up supplies from that dry brook beyond the garden.'

'Right, Lew,' returned Jack; 'you've hit the bull's-eye there, I know. At that rate it'll be awkward to drop stones on them if the axes start again.'

They were waiting every second for the blows of the axe-heads to ring once more on the planks of the doors. Jack looked at Mr Martyn, who had knitted his brows in grim resolution.

'It's going to be awkward to stop the axemen, Mr Martyn, with these stones whizzing over the walls by the score,' said the patrol-leader.

'I am most unwilling to hurt any one, Jack,' said the missionary; 'but I shall present the muzzle of my revolver at the first hole hacked in the door and shoot down the assailant.'

He cast an anxious look at the house as a stone crashed through a window; but the ladies

and Mr Martyn's children, two little girls, were safely under cover, and were watching, with pale faces, the little band of defenders crouched under the wall.

Moment after moment passed, the hail of stones poured on, and still no sound of axes was heard. Footsteps came and went without, and there were strange, odd noises, as of something brushing over the face of the main door. Then there came a sharp crackle and a pungent whiff of smoke.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ENTRANCE.

JACK made a leap at the ladder, went up it at a couple of bounds, thrust his head over the wall, and shot one swift glance below. Then he ducked behind cover again as a volley of stones was centred upon him. By a miracle of luck he escaped being hit. He had seen what he feared: a great pile of brushwood had been heaped against the main door and set on fire.

'They are trying to burn the door down,' said Mr Martyn.

Jack nodded.

'We must throw water on the flames,' said Mr Martyn, 'or the door will soon be consumed, and they will rush us and win by sheer weight of numbers.'

'Line up, Eagles!' sang out Jack; 'line up to pass water-buckets!'

It was a most terrible weapon which the Brethren had brought into play. Day after day of burning, scorching heat had baked every wooden surface dry as tinder. The pile of brushwood was already roaring like a furnace; the doors would burn furiously when the flames

licked their parched faces, and the fire would do the work of the axemen in swift time and with dreadful completeness.

Suddenly Tom Ward let out a shout, and pointed. 'Look there! Look there!' he cried. Three or four heads came into sight over the wall. Their assailants were climbing the wall, raised upon their comrades' shoulders. Mr Martyn lifted his revolver and fired. The heads shot back and disappeared. Mr Martyn stood on guard, his pistol raised, but no one exposed himself to another shot. The hail of stones had ceased for a few moments; now it broke out again. The Scouts ran to the house in search of buckets. Four were found, and these were swiftly filled at the well. Jack ran up the ladder with one, and lifted it over the wall, exposing himself as little as possible. Crash! a great stone struck the bucket and hurled it back on his side of the wall, and the water was spilt in vain. A fresh bucket was passed up, but the flying pebbles were now centred on the point above the fire, and the bucket was dashed out of his hands as soon as he raised it above the parapet.

'No go,' he said, and leaped to the ground.

'What can be done?' cried Mr Martyn.

'We must set an axe to work on our side,' replied Jack. 'We must chop a couple of holes,

one in the upper part of each door, and pour water through and keep the doors wet. That's our only chance. We've got to keep them off somehow. It's hopeless to look for a rescue-party yet.'

A heavy axe was fetched, and Mr Martyn handed the pistol to Jack and took first turn. As soon as he flagged, Jack seized the axe and went at the panel which the missionary had splintered. His fourth blow stove it in, and he hacked out a hole nearly a foot square, and clouds of thick smoke poured through. Then he sprang to the other leaf of the door, and broke a way through that much more easily, for the heat already affected that side.

At once the Eagles began a tremendous fight with the fire which threatened their lives and safety. Death was but a small part of the evil which menaced them. The knowledge of the awful sufferings which might easily befall the ladies and children, of the horrible tortures the Chinese love to inflict, tortures where death comes as a merciful release, spurred every Scout to do his utmost, and to work like a tiger to hold out the cold-blooded, merciless foe.

The ladies themselves sprang to help. One was left to watch over the children; the others drew water at the well and filled the buckets and vessels, which the Scouts carried between

the well and the doors. Luckily the well had a tiled roof on strong beams, and those who drew the water were protected from the hail of missiles. But the Scouts had to face the storm, and they faced it nobly. Jack and Lew poured water through the holes in the door; Tom and Dick Ward and Frank Murray ran to and fro with the buckets. Time and again all three were hit, but luckily no one received a disabling blow, and of mere bruises they made light.

For a time Mr Martyn watched the wall, but no one reappeared, and he took Jack's place at pouring water, and the patrol-leader joined his men in carrying buckets. Then Lew took a turn in going to the well in place of Frank Murray, who had received a stinging cut on the arm.

'Have a shot at the stone-throwers, Mr Martyn,' suggested Jack; and the missionary jumped.

'Upon my word,' he cried, 'I'd forgotten that the hole in the door lays them open to us;' and he fired his pistol at random three or four times through the smoke.

Yells of pain told that one or two bullets, at any rate, had found their billets, while the shower of stones suddenly ceased.

Jack grunted, 'Good business!' and the water-

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ers pegged away harder than ever now that had no longer to dodge missiles.

a short time the streams of water poured through the door began to get the fire under, and the Scouts breathed a little more easily.

'I think we've driven them off again for a time, Jack,' cried Mr Martyn in tones of deep relief; 'and before they march on us again surely help will be up from Wushan.'

'Hope so,' said Jack, wiping away the streams of blinding sweat which were running into his eyes. He was by no means sure of it. He knew the terrible difficulty which exists to get a Chinese mandarin to move. He knew, moreover, that the magistrate at Wushan had no soldiers. The official drew pay for a hundred

soldiers, but that was true enough; but then the money went into his own pocket, and the defence of the prefecture was represented by some odd assortment of weapons lying in a dusty corner of the arsenal.

Yamen. When soldiers were needed, he gathered a band of idle ragamuffins from the city streets, served out these weapons, and marched out with these soldiers of a day, or, rather, of an hour. Then at night the weapons were collected, and the fellows despatched with a handful of cash apiece until need for troops should again arise.

'It depends on for how long we've choked 'em off,' remarked Jack.

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The interval proved terribly short. A fearful danger menaced them from an unexpected quarter, and the storm was about to begin again. It began with a renewed hail of missiles. The missiles fell thick and fast, and so skin were they flung that they dropped into the little courtyard like rain, driving every one to shelter.

Mr Martyn sprang to the nearest hole in the door, but not an enemy was in sight; the throwers had placed themselves so that they could not be reached by a shot from the door.

When the pelt of missiles began afresh, Lew was at the well drawing water. Miss Lee and Miss Robins had been working with the cool and steady resolution of Englishwomen. The rope had chafed and scored their tender hands till the blood ran, and Lew had released them at the task. He was startled by a sound behind him. Mrs Martyn stood at the door of the house, screaming an alarm to her husband.

'They are coming through the roof, George! they have broken a way into the store-room! I heard them and ran to look.'

Mr Martyn spun round on his heel, and ran for the house and the attacked spot. Jack sprang to follow him, then checked himself at once, for a thundering crash rang on the door. It was being once more assailed. The enemy

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upon them from all sides; it was a moment at the nerve of the Eagles, and to try raining to the utmost.

His voice rang out: 'No. 2 and No. 3 support Mr Martyn; No. 4 and No. 5 stand by!'

He was obeyed promptly. Lew and Tom Ward seized their staves and dashed after the missionary. Dick Ward and Frank Murray lined up with their leader to defend the door.

When Lew ran into the house, he saw Mr Martyn disappearing at the end of a long passage. He rushed after him, and sprang through a doorway into a large room which occupied the far corner of the building. A fierce cry broke from the corporal's lips as he saw a danger which loomed at this point. The men had effected an entrance. The house like all Chinese houses, was one-storied. The detachment from the hamlet had been to the corner farthest from the courtyard. Yes, through the hole Lew could see that the gathering swarmed with their savage assailants. One had flung a spear down and leapt after it. Now he was springing to his feet and throwing the spear before him ready for a charge.

Mr Martyn dashed straight on the spearman. The Chinaman leapt to meet him, the long, venomous point, whetted to razor-like keenness, laid full for the missionary's body. The revolver

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barked, and the spear-thrust was delivered at the same instant. The Chinaman drove him to the point home, and then dropped, shot through the body. Down went Mr Martyn, the spear having been showing through his shoulder, and his head striking heavily on the stone floor.

As he fell, his revolver dropped from his grasp and rattled on the flags of the floor. Lew bounded forward, caught it up, and fired into the hole in the roof. There was a yell as the bullet landed home into those peering after their leader. He fired again, and then the trigger clicked harmlessly; only two chambers had been unemptied. But for the moment Lew had cleared the deck; the assailants had drawn back from the dark hole whence bullets leapt, and no one was in sight save the man who lay motionless on the floor.

'Where are the cartridges, Mr Martyn?' asked Lew.

'This pocket,' said the missionary, moving his hand to the left, the side where he was wounded. Lew shot his hand into the left-hand pocket of Mr Martyn's jacket, and pulled out a handful of loose cartridges, all that were left.

He threw open the revolver; it was a Tranter's self-extracting, and the tiny metal shells tinkled to the floor in a little shower. Lew swiftly slid fresh cartridges home, closed

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cylinder, and threw the muzzle up to the
and fired again as he saw a shadow flit
the opening.

Meanwhile Frank Murray had drawn the spear
from the wound, and the blood gushed like a
mountain. There was a swish of skirts, and
Miss Lee ran in, white as death.

'What is to be done, Mr Martyn?' she cried;
'the door is going down fast! The Scouts are
fighting splendidly, but they cannot hold them
out.'

Then she gave a cry of despair as the light
from the broken roof fell upon Mr Martyn
stretching on the floor, the blood welling furi-
ously on his shoulder.

'Got in and struck him with a spear,'
said she. 'I've cleared them out for a minute,
no earthly use to stay here if they'll
be in the yard soon. Up with him, and we'll
be back.'

With the help of Miss Lee and the Scouts,
Mr Martyn was raised and half-carried, half-
dragged back to the living quarters of the
house. As they gained the veranda, Jack ran
up; his brown face went white under its tan
when he saw their helpless burden. He had
been fretting under the delay of Mr Martyn's
non-appearance in answer to the message he sent
by Miss Lee; but he saw that he must at once

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take full command. His mind was fully up as to the best plan for them to follow now he had only to give orders.

‘To the stable!’ he shouted. ‘Every one to the stable at once! Quick!’

CHAPTER X.

IN THE STABLE.

ALL made a rush across the courtyard. Mrs Martyn sprang to assist her wounded husband; Miss Robins hurried with the little girls; Jack, Tom, and Frank brought up the rear, and they trooped into the big square stable and closed the heavy door.

It was a narrow thing. The strong bar was not in place across the door when the doors of the courtyard crashed inwards, and a score of the furious fanatics, sword, dagger, or pike in hand, swept in upon the fortress which had been so well defended. The Brethren rushed up the length of the courtyard and were gone. They had poured into the house in search of plunder and of victims. One of the Brethren, who had an eye at a hole in the door, had watched the entrance of the Yahoos, and now he glanced round the place of gathering. He knew the house thoroughly, for he had stayed there a week at a time with Mr Martyn, and he had chosen the stable as the only spot where they could hope to make a last stand. Any other room could be assailed at two or three doorways, but this strong building with, as he believed, walls of solid stone, was only entered by the single door.

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It was called the stable, and had originally been a stable, but Mr Martyn had never kept a horse there; it was used as a sort of lumber-room, and in one corner was stored a number of sedan chairs for the service of the mission people on journeys. It was lighted by a small trap-door, high up in the wall, and by round holes cut in the door itself; the stable formed the extremity of the right-hand wing. From his inspection of the place of refuge, Jack's eye next fell on his companions. Mr Martyn had been laid in a corner, where the light from the lofty window, whose hatch hung back, fell upon him. His wife and her companions were trying to staunch the flow of blood, and were ripping strips of cloth from their gowns to form bandages. Near the door crouched the two little girls, weeping in stifled silence.

At his back stood the patrol, waiting. Young Dick Ward had grabbed the patrol, and brought them in with him; and they stood beneath the Union-jack and the Stars and Stripes, bruised, dirty, and breathless, but not a thought among them of flinching from the close of the desperate and unequal struggle into which they had been so strangely and suddenly hurled. On the whole, the Eagles had come off wonderfully well. Mr Martyn was the only seriously wounded member of the party, and in a few words Lew

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bered to Jack what had happened. The up-
n the mission was now tremendous. The
n on the farther side of the house had
way a huge piece of the roof and swarmed
join their comrades of the door, and the
rang with yells and wild outcries as they
hurried from room to room searching for the hated
foreigners.

Jack was looking through a hole in the door,
when he saw a long, thin, yellow hand flash across
his line of vision. A Chinaman had stolen up
unperceived, and was seizing the handle to open
the door.

'Here they come!' muttered Jack, and Lew at
once passed the revolver into the hand of his chief.
Jack the muzzle through the hole and fired.
The entered the wrist, not six inches away,
fumbling at the handle, and the arm
read a yell of pain rang out.

ace the news that the 'foreign devils' were
Y stable was shouted from room to room.
ath heard the words and heard the rush of
the maddened rioters from every side. Missiles at
once began to whirl through the trap-door
window.

'Shin up somebody and shut it,' said Jack; and
Frank Murray climbed up as nimbly as a cat,
using some great wooden pegs, on which harness
had been hung, as a ladder. He closed the trap

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and dropped the wooden bolt which kept place, and the stones banged harmlessly on his stout face.

For a few minutes the attack ceased, and looting went on again. The foreigners could escape, but the valuables might be seized by others, so one and all turned to plunder. Jack, through the holes with which the door was studded, heard plainly the cries of the rioters.

'Take all of value,' cried some, 'then set fire to the house; the barbarians will perish in the ruins!'

But a strong voice, which seemed to be that of a leader, roared above the din, 'No fire! No fire! I will slay with my own hand the man who sets torch to the place. The barbarians must be dragged out alive!' And he went to the torture to which he intended to submit Jack. Jack ground his teeth and glanced round lest any one should have understood the threat, which had been greeted with wild shouts of approval on the part of the Brethren.

But none save himself had grasped the meaning of the words. Luckily the ladies only knew a little correct Chinese, and the Brethren were using the local dialect. Mr Martyn would have understood, but he had fallen into a stupor from loss of blood, and lay like a man from whom life had already departed.

Jack did not fear they would try to rush the door, for it could not be directly attacked without the assailant coming under fire, and they feared his weapon too much for that.

Ten minutes of dreadful suspense slipped slowly by. From which quarter would the attack come? Then heavy blows rang on the end wall, the gable wall which looked out to the open country.

'They're attacking that wall,' said Jack to his friend. 'That's queer!'

'Sure thing!' returned Lew. 'They're going at it for all they're worth. Seems to me if they're going to pound through a wall to get at us they'd have picked the partition wall between us and the house.'

But the Scouts did not know that their assailants had good reason for this plan of assault. Among the Brethren was a man who had actually worked as a mason in the building of this very house a dozen years before. And this man knew well that the gable wall of the stable was built largely of dried mud, with no more than a few stones here and there as a stiffening. It was upon his advice that the rioters had selected the end wall to be torn down. Tools had been found in the hamlet, and a dozen powerful fellows were ripping the wall away by huge flakes at a blow.

In an incredibly short time the besieged saw daylight through the wall which had looked so massive,

so powerful a defence. The rift was a mere crack; a resounding stroke and it was a hand's breadth; another blow and the sunshine poured in through a hole the size of a man's head. The Scouts darted across the room, and placed themselves before the helpless band in the corner. Jack stood at their head, his pistol pointed towards the assailed wall. He was ready to fire at the first man who showed himself, but no man appeared. The cunning workers never showed so much as a finger before the opening, but kept in cover, and piece by piece the crumbling wall went down before their powerful assault. Ere long the hole was the height of a man and the width of one, and still the destroyers laboured, and still the sun-baked mud and an occasional stone flew before their heavy blows.

Save for the sound of the tools on the wall, the silence was perfect. But Jack knew well that a score of hands were raised to hurl missiles at a defender who should come into sight; and suddenly the blows ceased.

The work had been done with dreadful completeness. In the end wall of their refuge a hole six feet high and four feet wide had been rent, and they lay open to the savage rush which was bound to come.

But the cunning of the assailants was not yet fully exposed. They had a further development in hand. Into the sunny silence came soft rustling

noises overhead; it sounded as if great birds were hopping and shuffling over the roof. There was no ceiling to the stable. The rafters with the cross-bars and the tiles laid upon them were in full sight; and over these tiles a score of bare-footed Chinamen were clambering and scrambling, feeling for loose tiles, working here and there to dislodge one and unmoor it from its hold on the tiling laths.

'They're going to make a hole in the roof again,' whispered Lew swiftly to his leader.

'No,' said Jack grimly; 'it's a hundred times worse than that, Lew. They're going to dislodge tiles, and throw them down on us. They've got us. We can't escape, and they'll cripple us at their ease, while a rush is made through the hole yonder.'

Lew gave a gasp of horror. The plan was as simple as it was horribly effective. A tile could be loosened and allowed to fall, and the man who did it could not be reached, for the tiles upon which he sat would protect him. The tiles were large and thick, and if a bullet cracked one it would certainly not pierce it, while their great weight made them terrible weapons when hurled from aloft.

Now the men above began to call softly to each other. Jack listened, and found that they were asking who had worked tiles loose, and where

the loose tiles were, and they seemed to be concerting a plan. There was more rattling and shuffling, and then one man whistled shrilly, and the sunshine burst in at a dozen places in the roof as the loose tiles were slid back all together. But each tile was only moved for a few inches, and through the crevices curious eyes peered to mark the positions of the captives. Jack raised his pistol, but his finger hung on the trigger; it was only wasting bullets to fire at the tiny cracks, and he dared not waste a shot. The revolver was now charged only in five chambers, and they had not another cartridge.

Now a great shout of mocking laughter pealed out from above. The merciless Brethren saw their helpless prey, and began to play with them as a cat plays with a mouse. A tile was raised directly above their heads as if the thrower was about to hurl it full upon them, and upon Jack turning the muzzle of his weapon to the spot, it was swiftly replaced. Then a tile was slid aside in another place, and a yellow face flashed for an instant at the opening and was gone.

And there through the gap in the wall the beleaguered victims could see the turn where the road for Wushan wound round a great banyan-tree and disappeared, and their eyes were fixed upon it in desperate hope and fear, hope and longing for the expected aid, fear that a few

moments more, and then whenever it came it would be all too late.

'Say, Jack,' murmured Lew; 'there isn't a tile loose in the far corner beyond the door. Let's nip across there. They'll have to pull 'em loose again, and that'll give us a few minutes.'

'Good for you, Lew,' muttered Jack, with a gasp of relief. 'Now, Eagles, up with Mr Martyn and carry him into the corner under the sound roof.'

The change was made in an instant, and the movement was as swiftly marked from above. There was a yell of rage from the Chinese on the roof, and tiles were hastily torn up. Too late. As the first great earthen slab was tipped over, the party hurried across the room, and the tile fell with a tremendous crash and smashed into pieces on the stones where Mr Martyn had been lying a moment before. A dozen more tiles followed, and the stable was filled with the crash of their fall and the ~~place~~ rang with the yells of the Chinese, howling like madmen, on the roof.

'Look out, Eagles!' roared Jack. 'Line up! Line up! they're coming!' There was a swift, silent rush of dark forms in at the gap in the wall; in they bounded, swordsmen one and all, armed with the terrible trenchant blades which lop off limbs as an axe lops off a twig. This attack had been precipitated by the hurling of the



"Ruh'om, Eagle's" roasted duck.

tiles. The Brethren posted near the gap had been waiting for the throwing of tiles as the signal to rush in. They rushed in; but instead of a band of helpless victims crushed under a rain of tiles, they found the Scouts lined up to await them, and the tiles falling in an empty corner, and, most terrible of all, the revolver spat fiercely at them, its note doubled and redoubled as the hoarse echoes rang and reverberated from wall to wall.

'Rush 'em, Eagles!' roared Jack, seeing the assailants pause and falter under this reception; and the Scouts sprang forward.

But even as they did so, Jack heard another sound, and his heart leapt in his body; and he saw a Chinaman standing in the gap pitch over like a log, and knew that a shot from without had brought him down.

'Back, Eagles, back, and cover the corner!' shouted the patrol-leader. 'Our people have come! Hear them firing! Back, back from the gap!'

And now all heard the crack of rifles and the dull report of shot-guns, and saw the Brethren flying madly for their lives as they saw the bunch of running figures without and knew them for foreigners hastening to the relief of their friends.

In a few seconds there was not a Chinaman in sight. Even the wounded had hobbled away or been dragged off by friends, and now a voice

was heard outside shouting, 'Lew! Lew! Where are you?'

'Come right in, father!' roared Lew; and in burst Mr Standing, followed by four members of the foreign colony and Lo Yung.

A scene of great excitement followed. The Scouts cheered again and again, and rescuers shook hands with rescued, and the little girls wept with delight.

'Say, this was a close call!' cried Mr Standing. 'I've been a dunderhead, I have—I've always laughed at the idea of those scaramouches proving dangerous; but, gee whiz! this beats the record. Are you badly hurt, Martyn?'

'I feel weak from the loss of blood,' replied the missionary feebly; 'but the spear-point has missed my lungs—I'm sure of that.'

'Thank Heaven for it!' cried Mr Standing. 'If it's only a hole, Mrs Martyn will soon patch that up for you, I know.'

Then Mr Martyn raised his voice until it rang almost as of old.

'Scouts,' he cried, 'I'm proud of you! Nobly done, Eagles; nobly done!' His voice failed and dropped.

'Ay, ay, we're all proud, Martyn,' said Mr Standing; 'prouder of 'em than words can say. Well done, Scouts! well done! And you've kept Old Glory flying and the Union-jack;' and he

looked with kindling eyes on the patrol colours which Dick Ward still held aloft. 'Say, if a patrol ever did a bigger thing than this, I've never heard of it.'

'We should have been lost without them—utterly lost,' said Mrs Martyn. 'We can never be too thankful that, under Providence, they came here last night.'

'Sure thing, ma'am,' returned Mr Standing, 'and we can never be too thankful we hurried ahead and left that one-horse show of the mandarin's a few miles behind.'

'Is the mandarin sending some soldiers, Mr Standing?' asked Jack.

'He calls 'em soldiers, my lad,' replied Mr Standing in scorn. 'But you know their little games. He's roped in a few loafers and put some ragged soldiers' coats on 'em and given 'em a few bows and arrows and some rusty pikes. They'll be here in time, I dare say.'

At this moment Tom Ward set up a shout. He had drawn the bolt of the stable door and looked into the courtyard. 'Fire! Fire!' he shouted; 'the house is on fire!'

He was right. Great billows of smoke were rolling down the courtyard, and Scouts and rescuers rushed out to see if they could save the place.

They could not. A single glance into the

blazing interior showed that it was hopeless to think of fighting the flames.

The Brethren had set fire to the house as they fled, and the main apartment, filled with furniture and panelled with wood, was well alight and the flames were leaping from room to room.

So swift was the progress of the fire that soon it became necessary to carry Mr Martyn into the garden, and place him in the shadow of a large bush.

'We'll bring those sedan-chairs along,' said Mr Standing; 'they'll be uncommonly useful in another hour or so when that military man and his rag-tag and bobtail turn up. As soldiers I don't expect they'll be worth much, but they'll do for chair-carriers.'

As for the Brethren, there was no more sign of them than if they had never existed. Before the small band of 'foreign devils,' armed with terrible guns which shot as fast as the trigger could be pulled, they had fled back to the hills as fast as their feet could carry them. They have a profound conviction that a repeating rifle repeats for ever, and that a hundred shots from it in a continuous stream is a mere trifle to its wonderful powers.

It was two hours later before a sedan-chair, borne in the midst of a straggling, disorderly throng, slowly emerged from the Wushan road.

In the chair was seated the military officer, and the horde of dirty, ragged ruffians round his conveyance formed the band of soldiery. The officer took the affair with the utmost calm. He listened, without moving a muscle of his face, to the news that the mission people had been rescued at the last moment. He would have listened just as calmly to a story of disaster, and he never ceased to fan himself gently. As for his tatterdemalion troops, when they heard that strings of cash would be given to men who carried the rescued people down to Wushan, they fought for the job, and had to be pacified by being arranged in relays.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE MEETING.

TWO days after the stirring times at the mission-house, Jack and Lew were returning home just as darkness had fallen. They had been to the house where Mr Martyn was lying ill of his severe wound.

He and his friends had been given the use of a house belonging to an English family whose members had gone down to the coast, and were now pulling themselves together again after their nerve-shaking experience with the Brethren. News of the latter came in constantly. They had done terrible mischief at Pa-li, a walled city, which the main body of the revolutionary fanatics had carried by storm and sacked; and it was reported that the viceroy himself, the ruler of the province, was on the march against them with a strong body of troops.

'The country's getting frightfully unsettled, Lew,' said Jack as they strolled along. 'Father says he doesn't like the look of things at all. He gets to know as soon as any one what's in the wind. He says that heaps of the people are heart and soul with those confounded old

A STRANGE MEETING.

Brethren, and if they get a chance they'll show what they think. He didn't half-like having to go down to the coast; but he'll get back as soon as he can.'

'Oh, he's gone?' said Lew.

'Went this morning,' returned Jack. 'He was really only waiting for the report we brought back from Mackenzie before he went.'

'I wonder if those pirates are more cheeky because of the upset in the country?' said Lew.

'Bound to be,' returned Jack. 'They always swarm out along the rivers when any disturbances are afoot. And then, if some real big-wig like the viceroy, or a general who's worth his salt, comes along and lays hold of a few of them and chops their heads off, they all lie low, and you'd never dream there were any such rascals within a hundred miles.'

'Rum country!' said Lew; and Jack laughed.

The Scouts were now walking on the grassy border of a narrow lane, which led to the compounds where they lived. On the one side was the wall of a 'go-down;,' on the other, a canal some fifteen feet broad. It served as a moat to defend the residences of the foreigners, and as a waterway to ship goods to and from the junks as they lay in the river.

For some sixty yards the Scouts walked in

silence; then the sound of voices ahead fell on their ears.

Jack seized Lew's arm, and the comrades came to a standstill and listened. With the fall of night and the closing of the 'go-downs,' this lane became quite deserted, and the boys had not expected to meet any one in it. It was very dusky, for along the banks of the canal sprouted a luxuriant growth of reeds overshadowing the narrow way.

What were these men doing here? For the low voices were those of men in earnest conversation. It might be a matter of no great importance; but Mr Burnet's words had filled Jack with an uneasy feeling that there was danger in the air, and with his father away he felt in charge of the place. These might be thieves aiming to break into the 'go-down,' and Jack put his mouth to Lew's ear.

'We'll go quietly up and see what these fellows are after,' he whispered.

'Right,' whispered Lew in reply; and the Scouts crept forward as softly as they could put foot to the ground.

As they drew near, one of the talkers raised his voice a little as if in anger, though he still spoke in restrained tones as of one who speaks of secret matters. It was a native, using the local dialect.

'I tell you, I am not satisfied,' he said. 'I had too little—far too little. I would not have joined you for so small a reward. Why, you had the rich garments and the splendid jade-stone from his thumb; and the things that were portioned to me were not worth five strings of cash!'

'Be silent, foolish man,' said the other. 'Your reward was equal to your services. Was I not the leader? Did I not form the plan and gather the band? And have you no more sense than to speak of such matters in this place? Let us go to my house and close the door, if you have aught to say.'

Jack had been wrinkling his brow in thought at the mention of the rich garments and the jade-stone ring. That sounded like loot from the mandarin's boat—a ring of the beautiful and precious jade-stone is a favourite ornament for the right thumb of a wealthy man. But when he caught the second voice clearly, he jumped. He could not help it, for he knew the voice again. It was the pirate captain who spoke.

Lew's conjecture had been right, after all. The huge swordsman who had led the river-wolves was a man who lived near them, who, perhaps, was connected with them in some way.

But who was he? Jack felt that the intonations of the deep, slow voice were familiar; but

for the life of him he could not put a name to the man. But here were two of the gang who had attacked the boat of the mandarin P'eng; of that there could be no doubt. He seized Lew's arm, and drew him back a little.

'What is it? What is it?' breathed Lew, for he could feel that Jack was trembling with excitement, and he, of course, had not understood a word of what had passed.

'They're the pirate captain and one of his band,' breathed Jack. 'I know his voice, and they're talking about the loot.'

Lew's action on hearing this extraordinary piece of news was like his prompt, cool self. He slipped his hand into his pocket, then felt in the dusk for the hand of his patrol-leader, and pressed into it a short cylinder.

Jack patted his corporal on the shoulder. Lew had passed over an electric torch, which would flash out a bright light on touching a button. Now Jack could creep up, throw a strong beam on the talkers and spot his man.

The voices of the speakers had dropped to a low murmur, and the Scouts moved up to the place, inch by inch, putting their feet down with the utmost care, and scarcely breathing in their eagerness to discover who these dangerous fellows might be.

Suddenly the deep voice of the giant became

audible as he slightly raised it, as if to close the conversation. 'Talk no more,' he said. 'What is done, is done!'

The voice sounded so close that Jack felt sure he was almost within arm's length of the speaker. He raised the torch, pointed it before him like a pistol, and pressed the button. The bright beam leapt into the darkness and struck full on a startled face. The eyes reflected the flame like pits of fire; the teeth shone white between the parted lips; and the man's name sprang to the lips of the almost equally startled Scouts—no name in all Wushan that they knew better.

They had recognised the Chinaman. It was Wong the fisherman; but both Scouts, wary and careful even in the midst of their great surprise, checked the name on their lips, and sprang eagerly forward to see who the mysterious pirate captain might be. But he had been standing deeper in the shade of the reeds than his companion, and with the first flash of the torch he turned and burst through them like a charging water-buffalo. The grove crashed, swayed, closed behind him, and then there was a resounding splash. He had leapt into the waterway, and was swimming for the other bank.

A second crash of the reeds, a second splash in the water, and Wong was after his leader. Jack rushed after them, pushed his way through

the reed-stems, and was thigh deep in the muddy ooze before he cleared the grove. He flashed the light of the torch on to the other bank, and saw the first swimmer already creeping up the farther side. For a moment he saw the man's back as the latter picked himself up from the water. Then the pirate made a leap into the field of tall millet which stood on the other shore and was gone; at the next instant, Wong disappeared in his wake.

Pursuit was useless. Even by day a field of millet is a sure refuge for a fugitive, so easy is it to hide among its tall stalks; by night it is hopeless to dream of following. Jack turned and struggled back to firm ground.

'Any idea of him, Jack?' asked Lew eagerly.

'None,' replied Jack. 'A whacking big fellow, dressed as a coolie; but that's very little nearer to it than we were. And to fancy we could almost have put our hands on him!'

'Well, we've got a notion of one of 'em, at any rate,' chuckled Lew.

'So little Wong's a pirate, is he?' said Jack. 'I wonder if he's a regular member of the gang, or went to avenge himself on the mandarin for sinking his sampan? From what he said just now, and what I know of him, I should rather fancy this was his first go at the business.'

'Say, Jack,' cried Lew, 'does a little light

begin to break in on you? Wong was the chap who flung you overboard. See! He knew you could swim like a fish, and he wasn't going to let them lay a finger on you after you'd saved his kiddies. And, gee whiz! I was right about the pirate captain being too flabbergasted to drop that sword of his on to you. Say, Jack, those bloodthirsty pirates are going to turn out bosom friends of yours. We shall have to boot you out of the patrol for keeping bad company.'

Jack laughed. 'It begins to look as if you're hitting the right nail on the head, Lew,' he replied. 'The fellow who threw me overboard was about the size of Wong, and we know now he was there. And we've always been good friends; I've been fishing with him scores of times.'

'What are you going to do about him?' asked Lew.

'Nothing,' said Jack, after a moment's thought.

'Not ask him who his friend is?'

'No,' said Jack firmly; 'we'll keep our mouths shut, Lew. No other course is safe in this country, especially when times are disturbed. We can do no good, and we might easily do great harm by accusing Wong of being a pirate. Ten to one, we shall never have the chance if we wished to do it. He'll be frightened by this mysterious business of a light being flashed

into his eyes, and vanish as if the earth had swallowed him; he'll think some one is on his track.'

'I expect you're right, Jack. You know the country,' said Lew.

'Oh, I'm right this time, I think,' returned the patrol-leader. 'You go in, and talk it over with your father, and see if he doesn't agree with me.' So saying, Jack trotted off to get into some dry things.

CHAPTER XII

LEW, TEDDY, AND AH FOO.

THE next morning Jack was gathering persimmons from a tree in the compound, when he heard shrill whistling break out in the next garden. For some time he took no notice, until he observed that the whistling was still prolonged, and he smiled as a head came into sight over the dividing wall.

‘Hallo, Lew!’ he cried; ‘I thought you bragged that your Teddy pup always cut to your first whistle?’

‘So he does,’ called Lew in reply. ‘I can’t think where he’s got to. I suppose you’ve seen nothing of him?’

‘Not likely!’ replied Jack. ‘He’s a knowing little pup, but I don’t fancy he can shin over a wall yet.’

The head disappeared. Lew went off on a fresh hunt for his pup, and Jack continued to pick persimmons.

Presently the head popped up again.

‘Say, Jack,’ cried the bereaved Lew, ‘there’s neither hide nor hair of Teddy about the place! It’s frightful; I can’t think what’s come to the

pup. I wonder if that old Ah Foo knows anything about him; the cook says he was about here last night, smoking opium with Chang the porter.'

'Ah Foo!' said Jack. 'Why, he shakes in his shoes before Teddy.'

'I dunno,' returned Lew; 'he might have had a chance to hit Teddy a crack, or tip him into the creek. I'm going down to his place, anyway, to see if he knows anything about the little pup.'

Jack grinned. He had tried more than once to get the truth out of a Chinaman, and he had seen others try. The result was always the same—you landed a lot farther off from the facts of the case than when you started.

'Spare your legs and your wind, my son,' he remarked. 'You'll waste them both—I've been there.'

'Well, I'm going for my try,' went on Lew in his obstinate fashion. 'P'r'aps I'll shake the facts out of him before I've done. Keen savvy?'

'What will you do?' laughed Jack.

'Oh, I'll find a way,' replied Lew, and vanished.

Jack finished picking the basket of persimmons, and took them into the house.

'I wonder what Lew will be up to?' he

thought. 'He's a lively bird when he gets started, and he's in dead earnest about that pup. I'd better go and see he doesn't hit on a way which might get him into mischief in this country.'

In the meantime Lew had sought the abode of Ah Foo. The washerman lived by himself in a small house—one-storied, of course, and also, of course, standing by the water, beside a little spur of the creek which bounded the foreign settlement. In the water at his door he washed the clothes of his customers, and in a tiny patch of meadow between his house and a bamboo grove he spread the clothes to dry in the baking heat of the sun.

Lew had got it strongly into his head that Ah Foo knew something about Teddy, and he was determined to find out that something if possible.

'According to Jack, I'm up against a tight proposition, trying to knock the truth out of a heathen Chineese,' reflected Lew, when he had got down from the wall. 'Never mind, I may jerk it out of him yet.'

He grinned as an idea came into his mind, and he at once marched off to find the simple materials he required to carry out his little plan. When he had stowed what he wanted in his pocket, he went in search of the washerman, and found him solemnly wagging a pair of chop-sticks

over a bowl, the contents of which had a savoury smell.

'Hello, Ah Foo, getting some chow [food]?' said Lew.

'Yes,' said Ah Foo; 'good chow—velly [very] good chow.'

He spoke with much solemn politeness, and never moved a muscle of his face as Lew complimented him on his good dinner. This was quite the correct thing for Lew to do, as food is a thing regarded with the greatest respect in China. So many of them get so little of it in that big, hungry, over-peopled land that a square meal is not to be dismissed as a trifling matter.

'Say, Ah Foo,' began Lew, 'I've lost my little pup. Do you know anything about him? Have you seen him anywhere?'

Ah Foo ceased plying his chop-sticks for a moment, and raised his huge, moony face. It was as flat as a frying-pan, and as blank of expression.

'Me no savvy [I don't understand],' he replied. Lew dropped into pidgin-English.

'Little dog b'long me gone lost,' he said.

'*Hi-Yah!*' cried Ah Foo, a glimmer of understanding coming into his wooden face; 'leetle doggee?'

'Leetle doggee,' said Lew.

'Teddee?' cried Ah Foo.

'Teddee,' said Lew.

'Pitee!' cried Ah Foo; and Lew nodded.

Ah Foo had now gathered Lew's meaning; but he shook his head, and in voluble 'pidgin' declared that he knew nothing of the dog, and had never set eyes on it since Lew had rescued him from Teddy's unwelcome attentions.

All this sounded very well, and Ah Foo was very moving and earnest in his protestations; yet Lew was not satisfied. He did not show his dissatisfaction, however, but looked upon Ah Foo as blandly as Ah Foo looked upon him.

Presently Ah Foo put away his basin and his chop-sticks, and went about his work. Lew strolled out of the house and round the corner of it.

Just round this corner there was a small window commanding a view of the path to the road, and from no other point could any one within the house see the path. Below the window Lew waited, his hands raised, his whole body ready to spring.

Within twenty seconds things turned out just as he expected. The window was a mere hole in the wall, closed by a wooden shutter. Very quietly the shutter was drawn back, and out popped a head.

Ah Foo wished to see his visitor safely off the premises. But Lew instead of marching away

down the road, as the washerman had expected, was behind him, and up shot a pair of quick hands and cast loose, with a sharp tug, the immensely long pigtail coiled round Ah Foo's head. The washerman let out a shrill yell, and tried to leap away from the window. He tried in vain. His pigtail was outside, and was coiled round Lew's hands like a rope, and his head was drawn firmly back through the window.

'Got him!' chuckled Lew, and held on, while Ah Foo howled and squirmed, and turned a face convulsed with anger on his captor.

Big and strong as he was, the Chinaman was a perfect prisoner in the hands of the Scout. The window was so small that he could not get a hand through to tug his queue back, and the tough rope of black hair held him tight up in the window frame. He feared, too, lest his queue should be injured, and that is one of the most terrible misfortunes that can happen to a Celestial.

Suddenly the anger passed from his face as if it had been wiped off with a cloth. He smiled an immense broad smile, and gave a low guttural laugh.

'Yes, yes; makee one piecee jokee,' he said. 'Now let go.'

'Not by a hatful,' said Lew; 'no jokee b'long me this time. Where's my doggee?'

'No savvy,' replied Ah Foo.

'I'll sharpen your memory,' said Lew; and he released one hand from its hold and drew a pair of scissors from his pocket and brandished them. 'Now, then, speak out, or off it goes!' and he clashed the blades together.—*snip-snap!*

Ah Foo's face went livid. The smile vanished, and a look of dreadful apprehension took its place. Could this terrible boy mean any harm to his much-prized queue? To Ah Foo it meant very little less to lose his queue than to lose his head. Lew did not quite understand the tremendous force of the argument he was using; but he saw it was of great power, and he clashed the scissors again, and Ah Foo trembled.

At this moment Jack cut in at the gate. The patrol-leader could not help laughing when he saw how neatly Lew had pinned his huge antagonist; but when his eye fell on the gleaming scissors, he ran still faster up to the place.

'Easy with the clippers, Lew,' he murmured.

Lew jerked Ah Foo's head round so that the Chinaman should not see, then winked meaningly, and Jack understood that the demonstration was only intended to terrify.

From this point of view it was a great success. Ah Foo was ready to collapse with fright, and, in his own tongue, begged Jack to save him from the dreaded scissors.

'Very well,' said Jack, 'but you must tell us what you know about the disappearance of Teddy.'

The washerman began another story of protestations, but Jack checked him.

'No use, Ah Foo,' he said; 'that won't do. We know too much; we know you were in the compound last night, smoking opium with Chang. It's no good your saying that you never went near the place. Come, out with it.'

Ah Foo turned his head round to look at Jack, and his face took another turn of expression. It became bland and smiling, and he said as calmly as if the inquiry were just commencing, 'Yes; I can tell you something.'

'He can tell us something,' translated Jack to Lew.

'I felt sure he could,' cried Lew. 'I'm jolly glad I stuck to him and brought him to the point.'

'But,' went on Ah Foo, 'you must promise me that I shall not get into trouble over it. I will tell you the man who took the dog, and I will tell you what he did with the dog. But I am not to suffer in any way.'

Jack explained to Lew.

'That's all right,' said the latter; 'let him go ahead. We'll take care nobody hurts him if he tells the truth. I just want to find out who bagged my Teddy.'

Jack assured Ah Foo that they would see him safe from the wrath of the man upon whom he informed.

'Me no catchee one piecee trouble,' said Ah Foo, dropping into the 'pidgin' which Lew could understand.

'No,' said Jack; 'you'll be all right.'

'English honour?' said Ah Foo.

'English honour,' echoed Jack.

The fear in the washerman's face gave way to a look of pensive calm, and his black eyes melted into the gentlest of smiles as he softly murmured, 'Me catchee leetle doggee—me, Ah Foo. He makee good chow—velly good chow.'

As the import of this cool confession dawned on Lew's mind, and he gathered that the Chinaman had stolen his little dog and turned him into a good dinner, the Scout's face was a sight to see.

'Confound it all!' roared Lew; 'he's eaten my Teddy pup! That's why his soup smelt so good. I'll show him!'

He raised the scissors, but the movement and the words were checked together. It flashed upon the Scout that Ah Foo was safe, that nothing whatever could be done to him—that they had passed their word.

Lew and Jack looked at each other, and read defeat in each other's eyes. The washerman had

outwitted them ; and above, at the window, Ah Foo smiled blandly, serenely, sweetly, and waited for his pigtail to be restored to him. Lew could not help giving it a tug, which made Ah Foo squirm, before he released the rope of black hair. It was jerked 'swiftly through the window ; the window was slammed to, and in another moment the door followed suit, and Ah Foo was safely ensconced in his dwelling.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACK'S ADVENTURE.

THE two Scouts were now compelled to return home, Lew fuming and raging for the loss of his dog, and Jack rather puzzled why Ah Foo should have done it, for it might mean the loss of a good customer, and the washerman had too many rivals to permit him to play fast and loose with his employers. But before they reached the compound gate they were met by Lo Yung, their Brother Scout.

'Father wants to see you,' he said to Jack; 'a runner has come from Ho-Chow.'

'What is it?' cried Jack. 'Something wrong there?'

'I'm not sure, but I'm afraid so,' replied Lo.

'Say, has anything happened to Mr Mackenzie?' said Lew.

'Come along; we'll soon see,' murmured Jack; and away went all three at a run for the compradore's office.

Lo Yung's father was a small, unassuming man, clad in rather mean clothes, with slipshod shoes, and smoking a long pipe while he read a Chinese letter.

In the corner of the office an elderly coolie sat on his heels in the position which a Chinaman can maintain for hour after hour, and which gives a European a fearful cramp in less than five minutes.

'Here is the young master,' said the compradore to the coolie. 'Tell him your story.'

From the man's account Jack learned that Mr Mackenzie also had been attacked by an anti-foreign mob, and his arm broken by a heavy tile flung from a house which he was passing. He feared an attack on the *hong*, and had sent word of his situation to headquarters.

'It is very unlucky that the master has started for the coast,' said the compradore. 'What is to be done?'

He looked questioningly at Jack. The compradore was a first-rate man of business; but this was not a matter of goods and trading, and now he was a little at sea.

'I'll go and see how things stand,' said Jack promptly.

'You must be very careful,' said the compradore. 'Ho-Chow is in a very excited state. I have been questioning this man, and from what he says it is not safe for white people to go openly about the town.'

'Mr Mackenzie said there was trouble brewing,' remarked Jack; 'but I don't think he expected

to be in the middle of it. I'm very sorry he's been hurt.'

'You, too, may be hurt if you go to Ho-Chów,' said the compradore.

'Must chance that,' replied Jack. 'Can't hang back for fear of getting a bang or two. I'm bound to see how things are with Mackenzie, you know.'

'I'll come with you, Jack,' said Lew. 'I know father will let me go.'

Jack nodded at his chum, and thought for a moment. 'We can do it as easily as possible,' he said. 'A canal from the river passes along one side of our *hong* in Ho-Chow. All right; we'll give this coolie a note for Mr Mackenzie, telling him at what time to expect us, and start the runner back at once. Then we'll go by boat, and slip quietly into the town after dark by water, and land direct at the *hong*.'

'Yes, that is a good plan,' said the compradore. 'It is safe and quiet.'

'That's what we'll do,' said Jack. 'All I shall want will be an express-boat, and a good reliable man to row it.'

'I can find them quite easily,' said the compradore. 'The boat can lie in the waterway outside your house, so that you can get into it there, go into the cabin, and no one will see you as you go down the river.'

'Good!' said Jack; and he gave him a time

at which the boat was to be ready—about an hour and a half before sunset.

But there was a good deal to happen before Jack started for Ho-Chow; and though he did not dream of it, he was on the brink of a most astounding discovery. It came about in the simplest fashion possible. About four o'clock in the afternoon he thrust his hand into his breast-pocket in search of a tiny thumb diary, in which he recorded matters of importance to be remembered and plans to be carried out, especially in reference to scouting work and the business of the patrol. The book was not there.

Then Jack recalled to mind the fact that he had put on a clean suit of clothes that morning, and that the book was in the pocket of the jacket he had worn the day before. During this hot weather Jack was wearing suits of white linen drill, and they needed frequent changing and washing. He ran to his own room, but the soiled clothes had disappeared.

Jack called the house-boy, and the boy came. In reply to Jack's questions, the boy said that the washerman had fetched away all soiled linen about an hour before. The washerman was Ah Foo, who did the bulk of the washing for the small foreign colony.

Jack cut away again for Ah Foo's house, to rescue his little pocket-book. It was so small

that he feared the Chinaman would not observe that it was there, would perhaps throw the garment into water to soak, and so ruin the diary, which contained a lot of notes which Jack would be in a fix without. He gained the lonely dwelling, and found it deserted. He called Ah Foo's name, but there was no answer. He opened the door and glanced into the house. It was empty and silent.

'Where's my jacket?' said Jack to himself. 'If I can drop my hand on it I will soon find what I want. Ah Foo's out somewhere.'

He went into the house, and the door fell to again; it had a habit of doing that, unless it were opened right back. Jack looked round for his linen suit. A heap of soiled clothes lay in a corner. He turned them over. Nothing of his was there, and he crossed the single room to an inner door—a door standing slightly ajar, and opening into a little place about five feet square, where Jack had often seen clothes hanging on wooden pegs driven into the walls.

Jack opened the door a little wider, and almost the first thing he saw was his linen jacket, hanging on a lofty peg. The back of the place was boarded, and fitted with many thick wooden pegs for hanging up clothes. He jerked it down—for the peg was too high for him to reach with his hand—and felt in the pocket.

Yes, the little book was there, and Jack seized upon it with much satisfaction. Then he hung up the coat, placing it on the same peg as before. He found a little difficulty in doing this, for not every one could reach up to pegs which were used easily by Ah Foo with his great height and long arms.

Jack raised himself on tiptoes and grasped at a peg about the level of his shoulder to aid him in his reach. Just as he caught the collar of his coat on the upper peg, his weight came full on the peg which he grasped in his hand, and it seemed to give way with an odd, sharp click.

'Hallo!' thought Jack, 'I've broken this one. Perhaps it's an old one, and I've been a bit too heavy on it.'

He looked at the peg; but it did not seem to be broken, and Jack was rather puzzled. He pressed it again and pulled it to see if it was loose, when, to his immense surprise, he found that the boarded back—or rather a good-sized portion of it—was swinging forward.

'By Jove!' murmured Jack, 'a hidden door, and a jolly good one, too! If I hadn't by chance hit on that peg and pressed it the right way, I should* never have dreamed that the back was not solid. I wonder what old Ah Foo keeps in his secret chamber.'

He could not resist the impulse to peep through

the door—or, rather, the large hatch, for it was about four feet high and two feet wide. He glanced in, and saw a recess about a yard deep, the farther side being the gable wall at one end of the cottage. It was lighted, though no gleam of light from the back had shown in the little room before Jack pressed upon the spring.

Jack popped his head through the half-opened hatch, and glanced up at the source of light. It was a hole in the roof—a hole cunningly hidden among the thatch; but at this moment the sun was shining full upon it, and a stream of bright rays was pouring into the hidden place.

Jack had turned his head to the left to discover whence the sunshine came. Now he glanced to the right to see what lay behind the hatch. He started, and his lips rounded to form a whistle of surprise. But no whistle came, for he had not the breath for it; he was completely taken aback.

There, full in the glowing sunshine, hung a shimmering mass of gorgeous silken robes, glittering with magnificent embroidery, and Jack knew the robes, knew the splendid design of the pheasant pattern worked on the breast—knew, indeed, that he was looking on the dress of the mandarin P'eng, who had been slain by the river-pirates in the attack on the house-boat.

'What's this?' breathed Jack in deep wonder.

'What's this? Is Ah Foo an accomplice of the pirates? Do they use his house as a place to store their plunder? Those are the robes of P'eng—I could swear to them anywhere.'

In his eagerness, Jack entered the recess and approached the shining silken dress. On the left breast there was a rent in the robe, and the silk was discoloured around it. Jack looked closer; the rich fabric was stiff with dried blood, and the rent marked the spot where a pirate spear had been driven into the heart of P'eng, the powerful mandarin.

The Scout nodded his head as assurance was thus made doubly sure. But further and more startling confirmation was at hand. The silken robes were not huddled carelessly together; they were spread out neatly on a framework of bamboo. It was clear that their owner was taking great care of them until the time should be ripe for disposing of them.

Jack lifted one wide, long arm of the outer robe, and glanced deeper into the recess. A ray of sunlight slipped over his shoulder and lighted the dusk. In the light a horrible face was to be seen—the face of a grinning demon. It was a mask hanging on the wall, and below it a heavy sword in a lacquered scabbard leaned in a corner.

'Got him!' breathed Jack in a deep whisper. 'Got him! There's his outfit. Ah Foo is the

pirate captain! Now I know why there were familiar tones in his voice. So it was Ah Foo all the time!’

Lew would have been very much astonished at the big gaby of a washerman turning out to be the desperate and daring leader of the river-pirates. But Jack was not. He knew Chinamen too well for that.

Jack stood for a few moments running things over in his mind, and felt more and more certain that he had unearthed the captain. Ah Foo had two faces—one, that of a meek, timid washerman, turning the most innocent and moonlike visage on the world; the other, that of a bloodthirsty river-wolf, who slew and spared not when human lives lay between him and his prey.

Suddenly it flashed into Jack's mind that he stood in a position of great danger. Suppose Ah Foo came home, and he might walk into the house at any instant! Jack knew now that a dangerous and terrible man lay under Ah Foo's meek exterior, and he knew that the pirate's vengeance would be swift and ruthless if he were discovered.

‘He'd cut my throat out of hand to save his own neck,’ thought Jack, and he made a couple of swift strides back to the hatch. His heart gave an uneasy jump when he found it was shut. He pushed at it, but it did not yield. He pushed

harder, put his shoulder against it, and exerted all his strength. In vain; the hatch once more seemed part of the solid wall, and there was not so much as the sound of a creak to show that it existed, or a crack to be seen in the face of the heavy planks of teak.

'I've done a stupid thing in leaving it,' thought Jack; 'I ought to have kept my hand on the latch and held it open. 'It's one of those that shut softly on a spring. Now, how does it work from this side?'

He began to search eagerly for some sign of the mechanism by which the hatch was opened from the inner side; but he found none. He began to feel uneasy, for he knew how cleverly the Chinese construct these hidden panels, and how difficult it is at times to penetrate the secret of their working. For some three or four minutes Jack searched with feverish haste, pressing and pushing at every plank; but the hatch remained fast.

'No go!' said Jack to himself. 'I might be here an hour and never get hold of the trick; and if Ah Foo should come home and find me, it would be all over with me; he'd never give me the chance of telling others what I'd seen.'

He now looked up towards the hole in the thatched roof above his head. He must climb

up, break the hole larger with his hands, and creep through it. In no other way could he escape from this death-trap. The hole was about ten feet from the ground, and Jack ran his fingers over the wall to find some grip for hands and feet. He found none. The wall was built of truly laid bricks, and the inner partition of smooth planks of teak.

Jack now set his back against the wall, and braced his feet against the partition—it was only three feet away—and started to work his way up. First he moved his feet two or three inches, keeping his back firmly braced against the wall. Then he pressed with his open hands on the wall, and worked his shoulders up a little. It was a trick which only a first-class athlete could perform; but Jack's tough muscles and supple limbs brought it off in capital style, and he went steadily up, inch by inch, until he was just below the hole in the thatch. Now came the most ticklish piece of the whole job. His body was braced rigidly from wall to partition, and he raised his hands to seize a support by which he might swing himself up to the hole, and drive first his head and then his body through it.

The reed thatch was laid upon bamboo poles. The latter were not thick, but a slight pole can be immensely tough and strong, and Jack had no misgivings as he took a firm hold upon one

beside the hole and raised his body, keeping his feet still firmly braced against the stout teak planks. His head was already in the hole, the thatch brushing his shoulders, when, to his horror, he felt that the bamboo was giving way. He clutched wildly to seize another, just touched it with the tips of his fingers, felt his hold slip over its smooth face, and then fell headlong back into the death-trap.

Jack landed all of a heap, but he was up again in a second. 'Confound that bamboo!' he thought. 'It seemed all right, but there must have been a rotten place in it. Next time I'll try one a bit before I put my weight on it.'

But there was to be no next time; for even as Jack set his back against the wall to work his way aloft once more, he heard a voice in front of the house—a voice which caused his heart to leap in his body.

'Come in,' said Ah Foo; 'come in. We can talk better in the house;' and the voice of a second man murmured assent.

Jack heard them shuffle into the house, heard the scrape of a bench as they seated themselves; and he listened intently, his ear laid against the partition to hear the second man speak. It might be some one on whom he could call for release, in whose presence Ah Foo dared not attack the discoverer of his dreadful secret.

The stranger spoke, and Jack's heart sank like a leaden plummet in water.

'Then the mandarin P'eng is truly dead?' said the man.

'Truly,' replied Ah Foo. 'I slew him myself after he had shot two of my men with his pistols; and now I claim my reward.'

'I have it with me,' said the man; 'but the mandarin Yang will not pay unless he is assured that P'eng will not trouble him any more.'

'You shall see the robes I took from his body,' replied Ah Foo. 'You shall see the rent made by the spear.'

'Good!' said the other. 'In that case I will pay the fifty dollars; but I must have the torn robe to show the mandarin, my master.'

'You shall have it,' replied Ah Foo. 'Come, it is in here.'

Jack looked wildly round. The river-wolf and this man who was a partner in his crimes were coming to the secret recess, and he must at once be discovered. The odds had been terrible enough in facing the gigantic Ah Foo alone; now they were doubled, for the stranger would assuredly aid the pirate. Jack looked up at the hole. No use; he had no time for the slow climb, without considering the fact that the scraping of his feet on the partition would at once give the

alarm. Time? He had no time for anything. He heard the door of the little room grate back on its creaking hinges. He knew that Ah Foo's arm was even now outstretched to press the secret spring.

CHAPTER XIV.

PERIL !

IN the recess there was but one spot where the slightest chance of concealment could be found, and as the spring clicked Jack darted for it with noiseless tread. It was behind the framework on which the silken robes of the murdered mandarin had been spread out.

The chance was poor enough, for the murderer and his companion were coming to fetch the robes ; but Jack took it for what it was worth, and slid into cover just as the hatch swung back. The robes swept the floor, and Jack was completely hidden for the moment as he crouched behind them.

A bright pencil of light was shooting into the dusk of the corner where the Scout lay hid, and Jack, raising his head a little, found that it came through a small rent in the robe, and this rent afforded him a loophole through which he could survey the hatch. Even as Jack glanced through the hole he saw a figure step into the recess. He knew the man at once ; it was the one-handed runner.

The runner looked at the robes and smiled.

'The mandarin Yang will be pleased to see them,' he said. 'P'eng can never be a thorn in his side now.'

'No,' said Ah Foo, whose huge face was thrust through the hatch; 'P'eng is out of his path for ever. I have earned the money, you see.'

'I will take the robe,' said the runner, and made a step forward.

Jack pulled himself together and set his teeth. He would be seen at once when the runner seized the robe. Could he dodge past the man and burst through the hatch?

It was a desperately poor chance, for there was very little room in which to pass the runner, and then the great body of Ah Foo filled the hatch. Still, he would have made the attempt had the runner advanced; but at this moment Ah Foo called on the policeman to stop.

'Leave it alone for the present,' he said; 'it will be time enough to fetch it out when you go. It is safest where it is; some one might come to the house.'

'But I must go at once,' replied the runner.

'No, no,' said the washerman; 'I have a bottle of *samsu* [spirits]. We must drink hot wine* together before you go.'

The runner, in Chinese fashion, still protested that he must go, and would go, and made another step towards the robes. But Jack in

his hiding-place was drawing a deep, noiseless breath of relief; he knew from the moment that hot wine was mentioned that he had a respite. No Yamen runner in the whole of China would hurry from a place where cups of *samsu* could be had as a gift.

'Come, come,' said Ah Foo, withdrawing his body from the hatchway; and the runner went.

Jack straightened himself and passed his hand across his forehead; his hand dripped with moisture, great beads of sweat had sprung out in the frightful tension of the last few minutes.

'It was touch-and-go that time!' breathed Jack to himself. 'It was lucky for me the old rogue had that bottle of *samsu*; nothing else could have saved my bacon. Now I've got a little time, thank goodness; they'll see the bottom of that bottle before they come here again.'

He stayed without moving for several minutes, for he could hear Ah Foo going to and fro in the house, and he knew it would not be safe to stir till they were set at the table with their hot wine and the tiny *samsu* cups before them.

At last he bent down, slipped off his shoes, tied them together by the laces, slung them round his neck, and crept forward. There was a murmur of talk in the house, and the voices became clearer as Jack crept along the recess.

In a moment he saw the reason—the hatch was slightly ajar.

Scarcely daring to breathe, he paused beside it and peeped through. He could see into the little room into which it opened, but no farther. Now he caught what they were saying.

‘How many can you bring to Ho-Chow?’ asked the policeman.

‘There are twenty-seven in my band,’ replied Ah Foo.

‘If they once make a start of the business there are plenty of idle fellows to follow their lead,’ said the runner.

‘And plenty for all in the foreign *longs*,’ remarked Ah Foo.

The policeman laughed. ‘Do not forget your friends in the Yamen when you count up the dollars you have gained,’ he said.

‘We shall not forget them,’ replied the pirate.

‘It will certainly be wise of you to remember them,’ returned the runner with a very significant laugh.

Jack’s heart throbbed with redoubled fear—a deeper, more anxious fear than he had felt for his own safety. What did all this mean? It meant a terrible confirmation of the news which Mr Mackenzie’s messenger had brought, that trouble was afoot in Ho-Chow. It was clear that an attack was being planned—an attack to be

led by the ruffians who haunted the river, an attack in which all the fury of a Chinese mob might be loosed upon the unfortunate foreigners in Ho-Chow.

At all costs he must escape and hurry to the city and warn Mr Mackenzie. Should he attempt the climb to the roof again? Jack looked up, biting his lip in deep thought. No; the plan which had been good while the house was empty was too dangerous now. He could not burst through the roof without making a noise, and the two villains would rush in, and he would be at their mercy. What, then, remained? This, that he should go boldly through the very house, trusting to a swift, silent dash to carry him to the open, where his speed would soon secure his safety.

The plan was no sooner formed than attempted. Jack laid his hand on the hatch and worked it open by portions of an inch; it moved smoothly and without a sound. Presently he had ample room for the passage of his body.

Now he stood in the little place where the soiled linen was hung, and he was on the brink of his attempt. It must be a swift and instant affair, for this door was clumsy and creaking, and would give warning of his presence the moment that he thrust it back.

He peeped through a crack between the heavy

planks and saw his enemies. They were seated at a small square table, whose legs were joined by cross-bars in the form of an X. They sat opposite to each other on plain stools with square seats, and Ah Foo had his feet planted on the cross-bars under the table, with his stool drawn closely up to it. This position was very favourable to Jack's purpose, for the giant could not instantly spring up. The Yamen runner had his back to Jack, and was leaning with one elbow on the table and the tiny *samsu* cup at his mouth, while he sucked down the hot wine he loved.

Jack could not help gazing for an instant on the face of Ah Foo. The pirate had dropped his mask—not merely his demon mask, but the meek, timid face which he had worn as a simple washerman. His very features seemed changed, for a grin was spread over them—a grin as brutal as his usual smile showed meekness and anxiety to please. In this congenial company he had let himself go; he looked the river-wolf that he was, and, as he spoke of the work to be done at Ho-Chow, like a wolf that scents blood.

Now Jack stiffened himself up for his rush. His way to the door would take him behind the stool on which the runner was sitting; but he had no great fear of the mandarin's man, and surely he could wrench open the door and be

well away up the path before the huge pirate could spring into pursuit. With his eye at the crack he awaited a favourable moment, and judged that it had come when Ah Foo, his head thrown back, was draining the last drops from his cup.

Jack flung the door open, leapt out, went across the room with three tremendous bounds, and dropped his hand on the bar. This slid in and out of a large wooden hasp and so secured the outer door, which, as he expected, was closed. Jack had opened this door by this bar dozens of times, and he caught the rudely carved projection which served as a handle and pressed it with all his strength, expecting it to slide back and clear the hasp, when the door would swing open.

But the bar remained immovable. He pressed again and rattled it to and fro with desperate force. No use; the bar did not move an inch backwards, and the horror of the situation struck upon Jack's mind with stunning force. The bar in some cunning way had been secured in its groove—how, he knew not—and the door was thus locked, and he was shut in with these desperate villains.

In this moment of frightful peril the Boy Scout was true to his order and his training; he kept his head, and spent the very few

seconds before his enemies could be upon him in swiftly running his fingers over and under the bar to see if it were held by some peg or bolt which he could withdraw. He found nothing, and a terrible yell and the crash of a stool to the floor told him that mischief was afoot. He turned his head, and saw Ah Foo rushing at him, the giant's features convulsed by fury and fear.

So swift and silent had been Jack's rush that the runner, absorbed in his *samsu* cup, had observed nothing of it, and was surprised beyond all measure to see Ah Foo spring up, utter a wild cry, and point to some object behind him.

'Spy! spy!' howled Ah Foo, his yellow face livid as he marked the spot whence Jack had leapt and knew that his secret was a secret no longer. 'Spy! spy!' again he roared, and darted at the Scout; and the runner bounded to his feet also, and made a furious spring to seize the heavy staff which every policeman carries, and which he had placed against a wall near at hand.

The runner knew not yet what had happened, but he saw that this sudden appearance meant danger to Ah Foo; and as his errand to the pirate was secret and unlawful, it might easily mean danger to him, and he rushed to join the giant in his mad attack.



Jack flung his shoes full into Ah Foo's face.

Ah Foo had no weapon. He did not need one. His huge hands—the long, yellow fingers twisting, closing, unclosing in savage threat—were all he needed. Could they but once be closed around the intruder's throat, his secret would be safe once more.

Jack found a weapon as the pirate rushed upon him. It was but a slight one, but it served for the moment. It was formed by his shoes. He snatched them from his neck, whirled them round by the laces, and flung them full into Ah Foo's face. They struck square upon the flattened nose, upon the black, glittering eyes; and as they struck, Jack dived under the outstretched hands and leapt away down the room. Here he came full on the runner, who was whirling round on his heel, brandishing the cudgel he had just snatched up. Jack whipped round the table, dodging the heavy blow, which landed among the *samsu* cups, and looked up at the window just beyond. But it was that in which Lew had pinned Ah Foo, and it was too small to go through even if his enemies had not been so close upon him; for the runner was springing forward to launch another blow, and Ah Foo was hurrying down the room, panting with fury, and breathing, 'Death to the spy!'

'The other window! the other window!' muttered Jack half-aloud, and set himself to

exercise every power to reach it. It was at the farther end of the room, a much larger window, glazed with a sheet of oiled paper, and below it stood a bench.

For just one second Jack poised himself on his nimble feet, facing his foes, and marking with steady eye what he had to do to escape. Then, like a first-rate Rugger man going with the ball under his arm into a band of opponents, he leapt out, playing the game, not for a goal, but for his very life.

He feinted the runner, dodging to the right and then swerving over at speed to the left. The feint completely deceived both attackers. Ah Foo made a tremendous bound to place himself in Jack's way, and shot out his hands to seize him, and the runner launched a blow which whistled through the air. But Ah Foo's hands closed upon nothing, and as he thrust them out down came the heavy staff and caught him a crashing, crippling blow across the wrists.

Jack saw nothing of this, for he was away down the room like a greyhound whose leash has been slipped; but he heard Ah Foo's yell of pain and fury, and felt certain the big stick had not dropped the blow where the policeman had expected to deliver it.

He gave one swift glance over his shoulder, and saw the ruffians whirling about to pursue.

Then he looked ahead, and calculated his spring. The window was rather high in the wall, but big enough—yes, he felt sure of that, and at the next moment he was absolutely sure; for darting up to it at full speed, he sprang on to the bench, then took a header straight at the slender framework filled with sheets of oiled paper, and went clean through it.

A couple of swift wriggles and Jack was hanging head downward outside. As he flung himself forwards, not caring how he fell, so that he did fall, he felt his left foot seized. He drew his right knee up, planted his free foot against the wall, and thrust himself outwards and downwards. To his joy he tore his left foot free of the grip which had been fastened upon it, and went down, pell-mell, upon the ground below the window. He was up and off like the wind. He doubled round the house, gained the path, and ran at top speed. He heard the door being dragged open, but the active Scout cared nothing for that. Let them catch him who could, now that he had a clear path before him, and he ran without pausing till he reached in safety the gate of his father's compound. Into this he hurried, then across the garden, over the wall, and so into the Standings' compound and up to their house.

Jack wanted to talk this over with some one,

and as his father was not at home, he wished to see Mr Standing. As it happened, he ran full on Mr Standing and Lew, who were coming out into the garden.

‘Say, Jack,’ said Mr Standing, ‘you look a bit bustled. Is there anything wrong?’

‘Rather, Mr Standing, and I want to tell you about it.’

‘Come into my room,’ said Mr Standing; and they all went back into the house.

Mr Standing listened in silence while Jack told his story, and when it was finished he gave a long, low whistle. As for Lew, he was utterly overcome with astonishment to find that Ah Foo the washerman was no other than the mysterious pirate captain.

‘Say, Jack,’ he burst out, ‘I guess I can hardly take that all in. Ah Foo! Ah Foo! Why, he’s always seemed just about half-sharp; he used to cut like a coon before Teddy. And he’s that big chap with the sword who led the pirates!’

‘It’s all right, Lew,’ said Jack quietly; ‘it isn’t so wonderful, after all. Wait till you’ve known ‘em a bit longer.’

‘Jack’s right, my lad,’ said Mr Standing. ‘I’ve known queerer things than this turn up.—But see here, Jack, this must be looked into.’

‘Just what I thought, Mr Standing,’ replied

Jack; 'that's why I came to you. Father's off to the coast.'

'We've got to look into it ourselves, too,' went on Mr Standing. 'There is evidently some hanky-panky game going on among the mandarins, and to go to the officials would be madness.'

He stopped speaking, and reflected for a few moments. Then he crossed the room, took a revolver from a drawer, and slipped it into his pocket.

'I guess I'll go down and look into this myself,' he said.

'We'll come with you, father,' said Lew.

'All right; get your sticks,' said Mr Standing. 'You'll make a handy bodyguard.'

Lew fetched Jack a pair of his shoes, but they were too small; so Jack ran home to get a pair and his patrol-staff, and the party met at the gate of the Burnet compound and went straight down to Ah Foo's cottage.

The door was shut, but not fastened. They went in. The house was empty. Jack led the way to the secret recess. That, too, was empty of the robes, mask, sword—not a sign was left!

'Cut and run!' said Mr Standing. 'A guilty conscience needs no accuser. We've seen the last of Ah Foo. I rather fancied he'd slide out

on top speed, knowing that Jack had unmasked him.'

'A thief to the last!' said Jack. 'He's bagged all the soiled linen he fetched from our place this morning. Short as the time has been, the place is stripped.'

'Yes, the clothes would fetch him a handful of dollars,' said Mr Standing; 'but it's quite clear he had plenty of accomplices in the neighbourhood to make a clean flit of it so swiftly as this. Well, the best plan for us is to keep our mouths shut. Least said soonest mended. I guess there's a pretty bad hornets' nest in this district. We'll do wisely not to stir it up.'

'What will Ah Foo do?' asked Lew.

'Hide himself in another city,' replied his father, 'and among the swarms and hordes of yellow faces you could no more pick him out than you could track one particular ant through an ant-hill.'

'Then we shall never see Ah Foo again!' cried Lew.

Little did the speaker think that he was making one of the most mistaken speeches of his life. Jack thought of Lew's remark more than once in after days—in days when the pirate captain's power hung over them like a black pall; when his cunning and influence

blocked their path, so that they groped their way like those who wander through a thick mist; and when Lew, above and beyond them all, had terrible reason to know that this acquaintance with Ah Foo was not yet ended.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERIOUS SAMPAN.

‘WE can do no good here,’ said Mr Standing; ‘we may as well go back.’ And back they went. ‘So you think they’re going to drop on the foreign *hongs* at Ho-Chow, Jack?’ he continued as they walked along.

‘I don’t see anything else for it, Mr Standing,’ replied Jack. ‘I heard what they said plainly enough.’

‘Yes, yes, I agree with you,’ returned the American; ‘and it seems to me you’ll do well to get Mr Mackenzie and the rest of the white people—there are only two or three there, I think—to come down here. They can leave the compradores to look after the *hongs*.’

‘That’s my idea,’ said Jack; ‘the thing that bothers me is, when are the ructions going to begin? I didn’t get any idea of that. The rioters might be laying their plans for to-night, next week, or next month, as far as I could gather.’

‘They’re a slow crew about every business, good or bad, are the Chinese,’ replied his friend. ‘I vote for next week, or, very likely, next

month. If you two nip up with the express-boat this evening, and lay the matter before Mackenzie, he can put two and two together, being on the spot, a lot better than we can.'

At the appointed moment the express-boat glided up the waterway, which lay outside the compounds, and Jack and Lew went quietly aboard. They at once slipped into cover of the mats which formed the movable cabin, and the boatman gave way, and the long, swift skiff shot down the waterway and out into the main stream. Here the Scouts lay closer still, for both their own instincts and Mr Standing's advice had warned them that it would be well to travel as quietly as possible to Ho-Chow.

Unrest among the mob is a very dangerous thing for foreigners in China; but when that unrest is fomented by officials, and is being worked for their own ends by governors and authorities, then it becomes ten times more dangerous, for the leaders of the mob know they have nothing to fear whatever excesses they may commit. At such times scores of keen eyes are on the watch for any movement among the threatened whites, and Jack knew this, and took measures accordingly.

Very soon the express-boat, driven by the powerful strokes of the first-class boatman, had left Wushan behind, and was out in the open

country, and the Scouts could venture to look out of the cabin. The boatman was a good, steady fellow, very expert at his business, and Mr Burnet's own man, the oarsman who took the merchant on all his water-trips about Wushan.

For an hour the skiff was driven forward at a fine pace, and then the hills in the east began to look dim.

The sun went down, and twilight began to gather. The Scouts hailed the approach of darkness with great satisfaction; the dusk of night would free them from the stuffy mat cabin, would enable them to sit outside in the sweet, fresh air, and would render their advance on Ho-Chow safe and easy—at any rate, they hoped so.

Suddenly the boatman in the stern gave a harsh, expressive grunt.

Jack started, and peered out. 'What is it?' he asked, for he knew the note was one of alarm.

'Look to the right,' replied the man.

Jack looked, and saw, with an uneasy heart, that a sampan, manned by four men, had glided out of a creek, and was slipping easily through the water in their wake. He withdrew at once into the cabin, and told Lew what he had seen.

'What's the game?' asked Lew.

'I don't like the look of it,' said Jack. 'What are four men doing in a sampan like that, and following us up? I'm afraid, Lew, they know we're in the cabin.'

'How could they?' murmured Lew. 'We've come straight from home at a rattling good pace, and they've just slipped out of a side creek as if they'd been waiting for us to pass by.'

'Easy enough to do that if any one was on the watch when we started,' replied Jack. 'You see, Lew, we've come by the river because it's the only safe and quiet road for us. If we had struck across country, we'd have passed through more than a dozen villages, and hundreds would have known we were bound for Ho-Chow. But the river's a long chalk from being the nearest road. Between here and home it sweeps round in a big horse-shoe bend, and if anybody had seen us start, and then had cut across the neck of the bend, he could be here half-an-hour before we came down-stream.'

'I see,' said Lew; and nodded. 'But why should the boatman be uneasy?' he went on. 'He knows nothing of our business.'

'No,' said Jack; 'but he knows there's trouble in the wind, and when a Chin-chin becomes suspicious it's no half-and-half affair—he suspects his shadow on the wall. And then

that sampan's manned in rather a queer fashion. What do four men want aboard a little skiff like that, and following us up, too ?'

'Are they following us up ?' said Lew. 'They may be on their way to Ho-Chow.'

'I'll soon settle that question,' replied Jack.

He called in a low voice to the boatman, and bade him row faster. The man put out all his strength, and made the express-boat shoot through the water. The sampan was being rowed by two men, using long sweeps. They now bent to their work, and sent the light skiff flying in the wake of the express-boat. Jack ordered the boatman to easy, and return to his former stroke. The sampan eased at once; the distance between the two craft remained constant.

'Say, Jack, they're hanging on to us right enough,' murmured Lew; and his companion nodded.

'I've heard you say this is a jolly good man,' went on Lew, glancing at the boatman. 'Think he could put on speed and get away from 'em ?'

'No,' said Jack decisively; 'that he couldn't. You see, old chap, it isn't only those two fellows with the sweeps we've got to reckon with. When the time's come for them to overhaul us, the couple in the stern will slip a *yoolo* into the water, and the sweeps and the

big stern oar going together will run us down hand over fist.'

'Gee whiz! I hadn't thought of that,' muttered Lew. 'Say, Jack, you know 'em good and well.'

'You've got to know a bit about these slippery cards,' replied the patrol-leader, 'or you'll soon be in the fix of a lifetime.'

'What's their game, do you reckon?' asked Lew.

'I think they want to stop us from going to Ho-Chow,' replied Jack. 'They'll run us down when it's dark enough, and turn us back, or keep us out of the place in some fashion or another.'

'Do they mean mischief?'

'They may or they may not. It depends upon who they are,' said Jack. 'I'll have a look at them,' and he slipped his hand into his breast pocket. 'I wonder if I know any of them?' he murmured as he drew out a small telescope in a leather case.

It was the glass he always carried with him when on scout-tramps, and it was a capital glass for its size. His father had given it to him on his last birthday, and it was the work of a famous London maker.

The light was going fast, but the west was still bright and clear, and both boats were travelling directly towards it. The sunset glow, striking

along the smooth, shining face of the river, cast a reflected brightness into the faces of the men in the pursuing boat, and the good little glass brought them so near that Jack could make out their faces quite well.

'No,' he said; 'I don't know one of them.'

'What do they look like?' asked Lew.

'Just as you would expect,' replied Jack. 'River people, coolies or boatmen, ordinary enough to look at. Have a squint;' and he passed over the telescope.

Lew adjusted the focus to suit him, and stared for a full half-minute at the pursuing sampan.

'Say, Jack,' he murmured, 'there's something in the bow, something which moves; but it keeps so low behind the gunwale that I can't make it out. You keep the glass full on the bows and you'll see what I mean.'

He handed the glass back, and Jack brought it to bear on the bow of the sampan, and kept it there steadily.

In a moment he gave a sharp, fierce exclamation. 'By Jove, Lew, you're right—you're right! Why, it's a fifth man! Five of 'em in that little sampan. It's plainer and plainer they mean mischief. He's raising his head! He's going to peep over the gunnel after us.'

'Why should he hide?' murmured Lew. 'Who is he?'

'Who is he?' breathed Jack in a deep whisper, as a large, moony face rose, inch by inch, above the bow of the sampan and peered after the express-boat. 'Who is he, Lew? It's Ah Foo!'

Lew gave a long, low whistle, and muttered, 'Gee whiz! Turned up already, has he? And I thought he'd cleared out for good.'

Jack saw the huge, broad, flat face of the pirate captain quite clearly as Ah Foo, confident in the distance which lay between the two boats, watched the vessel which he pursued. The man did not dream of the little telescope which bridged the gap and revealed his face to the patrol-leader.

'Ah Foo!' said Jack; and he scratched his jaw, and began to look on the affair in a very serious light. 'This is a jolly awkward business, Lew,' he went on. 'Ah Foo knows I'm up to his games, and he'll do his best to quieten us. The thing becomes ten times as black at once now that villain is mixed up with it. He was on the watch this evening, or had some one on the watch, learned at once of our start, and then came on foot and got ahead of us.'

'And now he's turned out some of his rascals to pursue us?' said Lew.

'That's it;' and Jack nodded.

'Why don't they row us down now?' asked Lew.

‘Not their way,’ replied Jack. ‘They’ll hang on to us and close under cover of the dark. Besides, a big boat or a junk might come along, and then they fear white men because of their firearms. They know there is not much chance of taking aim in the dark.’

‘They needn’t be afraid,’ said Lew; ‘there isn’t a shooting-iron in our outfit, worse luck.’

‘No; but they don’t know it,’ returned Jack.

‘What can we do?’ asked Lew. ‘See, the light is going fast. What about running the boat ashore and taking to the bank?’

‘Jolly poor chance,’ said Jack. ‘They know the country, and we don’t. They’d very likely bag us in no time; and we don’t know we’re not being watched from the bank. It might easily be a case of out of the frying-pan into the fire.’

Scarcely were the words out of Jack’s mouth than his judgment was proved true, for suddenly there arose from the pursuing sampan the harsh bellow of a great horn—such a horn as the Chinese often blow in order to terrify the evil spirits which they believe to be constantly lurking round them. The booming note was now a signal, for as it rolled, hollow and deep, across the river, it was taken up by a horn at a point far ahead of the express-boat, and by a third horn on the farther bank of the river. There was

but a single blast in each case. The horns spoke and were silent; but they had delivered their message, and Ah Foo had calculated his distance well. At the right point of dusk he had spread his net, and his men were ready to seize the game that he was driving into it.

The boatman had been rowing in silence and rowing very steadily. Now he spoke. 'Master,' he called to Jack; 'master, they are coming.'

Yes, the *yoolo* was out at the stern of the sampan, and the broad blade was swinging through the water with great power, and the sweeps were going faster, and the light, swift skiff was darting upon the express-boat with wonderful speed.

In the bow Ah Foo had risen to his knees, and was watching with fierce black eyes the dark bulk of the boat ahead. Now he had the white boys in his hands; now he could stop them from carrying to Ho-Chow the news of his intended attack on the foreign *hongs*. Now he could complete his revenge!

And what, in the express-boat, were the staunch chums doing?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BROTHER SCOUTS ARE PARTED.

AS soon as the sampan was driven in fierce pursuit of the express-boat, Jack urged his boatman to do his utmost. The man, a big powerful fellow, did his very best, and the long, slender craft shot forward at a fine pace.

‘I’ve got an idea in my head,’ said Jack slowly, ‘and there’s just a chance for us if we carry it out. Do you know where we are?’

‘No,’ returned Lew.

‘Why, not three hundred yards from the spot where the pirates seized and burned the mandarin’s boat. The boat was run on a mudbank, you remember. Well, that mudbank lies sharp round the next bend. At the rate we are spinning along we shall be round the next bend and past the wreck before the sampan sights us again. We’ll nip overboard from the bow, and hide on the side of the wreck towards the river. That will cover us from any spies on the bank; and if the sampan pursues the boat, there’s a chance for us.’

‘It’s just a chance,’ said Lew.

‘Just a chance,’ returned Jack. ‘I don’t offer

it as anything better. If you can see something'——

'I can't,' said Lew.

'All right, we'll have a shot at it,' said the patrol-leader. 'I'll just give this chap his line, and then join you in the bow.'

Lew crept to the fore and took off his shoes. In a few moments Jack joined him, and took off his:

'He'll peg straight ahead,' whispered Jack. 'We must slip into the water as softly as we can, and swim quietly!' Both of the boats were fairly inshore, and each could be seen by the occupants of the other as a dark blur moving swiftly over the dusky surface of the stream.

The express-boat swept round the spur of sand which lay at the angle of the river, and the boys looked back to see the sampan hidden by the sandy spit. They looked forward to see the wreck of the house-boat lying on the mud-bank, a black mass in the fast gathering night; and as their craft shot by, they slipped noiselessly into the water, letting themselves down from the gunwale by their hands, turning on their sides for the quiet side-stroke, and striking for the dark mass not twenty yards away. They reached it, touched its wet and slippery sides, and found foothold in about four feet of water. They crouched in the thick shadow below the burned

hulk, held their hats before their faces, and waited for the sampan. With a splash and gurgle of beating oars, it swept round the sand-spit, and came racing towards them.

Their hearts beat fast. Would Ah Foo stay to search the shadows in which they lay hid? But no. On went the pursuers, for they could make out the dim mass of the express-boat flying ahead, and never dreamt of staying lest it should escape in the darkness. On they went, and the Boy Scouts drew a deep breath of thankfulness as they saw they were safe from their terrible enemy for the moment.

As soon as the sampan had passed and was lost in the dusk, the two comrades waded towards the stern of the wreck, passed round it, and pushed their way towards the shore. They made a few strides, and felt at each step the bottom sinking away from them; for a deep, narrow channel stretched between the shoal where the wreck lay and the bank of the river. Jack was a little in advance, and he leaned forward and struck out. Lew followed, and they swam silently to the shore.

They came to the bank at a point where it was very steep, and they could not touch the bottom. But there was a low bush growing at the water's edge, and Jack reached up and caught its stout stem and drew himself half-out of the

water. As he did so, Lew, treading water a couple of yards out, saw two figures come into sight on the bank; he saw them against the sky, and saw one spring forward at a rustling of the bush and raise a stick.

‘Look out, Jack!’ called Lew in a swift, eager voice. ‘Jump back—quick!’

Jack loosed the bush and let himself fall into the river. Lucky for him he did so, for thus he escaped the full force of the swinging blow which was aimed at him, and the heavy rattan, checked by the tough branches, gave him no more than a sharp crack square across his skull.

At the next instant Jack was striking out down-stream as hard as he could lash the water. His head was ringing from the shrewd blow he had received, but it was far from stunning him or affecting his powers of swimming. He heard two splashes, and knew that they were being pursued. He glanced back and saw a head two or three yards behind.

‘Come on, Lew,’ he said; ‘we’ll make for the wreck, and then across the river!’

There was no answer; but Jack supposed that Lew was saving his breath for his work, and the patrol-leader turned and struck out again with all his might. It took him but a short time to gain the shallow in lee of the wreck, and here he dropped his feet, stood waist deep in the

water, and turned, expecting to be joined by Lew at the next instant. But no swimmer came to his side.

'He's lost me and gone farther down,' thought Jack; and called, 'Lew! Lew!' softly.

There was no answer.

Jack put his ear to the level of the water. He heard no splash of a swimmer's movements, and he called a little more loudly and listened intently.

Now he heard a shuffling and a scuffling in the bushes on the shore, and next the low, long-drawn grunt which no Chinese coolie can restrain as he lifts a heavy weight. Then the shuffling stopped, and the silence on both river and bank became perfect.

This silence took Jack's heart in a grip of terror. Where was Lew? What had happened to his good, staunch comrade? He cast aside all thoughts of secrecy, and called on his friend's name till the bank echoed with his cry. He listened eagerly. Not a word of answer from the surrounding gloom.

Jack hurled himself into the water, and swam at his fastest back towards the bank—back towards the spot where danger had threatened. He gained the place; he swam round and round, and caught the bush again and swung himself up to the bank.

No one threatened him now ; no one moved—all was silence and loneliness. Again he called on Lew, and again he called in vain. No answer from the river ; none from the bank ; and, in the dusk of night, how was he to make a search ? Here was a fresh mystery opening about his path—a far more terrible mystery than aught that had come to pass yet. Where was his brave old chum, and what had happened to him ?

Cramp ! The thought of that deadly enemy to the swimmer gave Jack's nerves a savage jerk. Had Lew sunk in that dark stream ? But Jack dismissed the idea in an instant. The most sudden attack of cramp would not prevent an expert swimmer from uttering a cry of distress, and Jack had heard nothing. Besides, what meant that scuffling at the water's edge and the coolie's note as if raising a burden ?

Jack felt that he was treading a path where all was darkness, and he knew not how to win to the light. Full ten minutes he stood there, listening and waiting ; but the silence remained unbroken, save for the drip of water as it plashed from his garments to the ground. He felt no chill, for the night was very hot.

Suddenly he saw a dim gleam at some distance down the stream. Whether it was a light from a house or a light in a boat, he could not say ; but it showed human presence, and, perchance,

an opportunity for him to gain knowledge of his friend's fate. He hastened along the bank, drew near to the spot, and advanced cautiously. His heart fell as he came up to the place and heard voices speaking. No news of Lew here.

The light came from a lantern, held in the hands of an old woman. She was holding it as a beacon to a fisherman, who now came sculling in' from the darkness of the river, and they talked as he came. She took the basket of fish, grumbling at the poorness of the catch, and went away with the lantern, leaving him to secure the sampan.

An idea came into Jack's mind. Here was a chance of working his way down to Ho-Chow. He could do nothing here to clear up the mystery of Lew's disappearance; better to take council with Mr Mackenzie. And again, there was the imperative need of conveying the warning, the original object of the journey.

Jack went forward and addressed the fisherman in his own tongue, and the conversation was short and to the point. The man jumped at the chance of taking a belated traveller, as he supposed Jack to be, down to Ho-Chow for a small sum, and begged him to go on board his sampan at once. Jack sprang aboard, and the fisherman sculled into the stream.

Jack directed him to cross the river and pro-

ceed along the farther bank, and the fisherman obeyed. The river was wide; the night had now settled down, and there was little fear of coming across the pirate sampan. But Jack took the other bank to make certain, and everything went well. The fisherman, under Jack's directions, landed him at the very spot where he had intended to disembark, under the walls of Mr Burnet's *hong*, and received with many thanks and exclamations of pleasure the sum of money which had been promised.

The Scout was now on the water-front of the *hong*, a narrow lane lying between the canal and the tall wall of the warehouse. The wall was broken by a single doorway, through which goods were carried. This passage was now closed by a massive door of teakwood, barred and bolted from sunset to sunrise.

In his note to the agent, Jack had arranged that a porter should be on guard at this door ready to open it, and a password had been given. But the time of arrival was long past, and Jack feared lest the guard should have been removed. But everything now seemed to be running his way.

Jack's first knock on the heavy door was answered by a cautious voice from within.

'Who knocks?' asked the watchman in Chinese.

'The son of him who owns,' replied Jack.

'Let the son give the word,' said the watchman.

'Hong-kong,' said Jack.

At once bolts began to slide and bars to creak, and the door was opened widely enough for him to slip through. The heavy entrance was at once slammed to and securely fastened.

Scarcely had Jack entered than he saw the agent, who had been coming from time to time to ask the porter if there was any news about the missing Scouts.

'Ay, lad, I'm glad to see ye!' cried Mr Mackenzie. 'Where's young Standing?'

Jack told his story, and Mr Mackenzie looked very grave.

'By all the powers!' he ejaculated; 'and the lad is Standing's only son. But he's never drowned. They've got him; they've carried him off!'

'I came on, for I didn't see what else I could do.'

'Naught else in the world you could do,' said the agent. 'But what the yellow rascals want with him passes my comprehension. Unless'—— He paused and pressed his lips.

'Unless what?' cried Jack.

'Unless it's a bit of kidnapping,' went on Mr Mackenzie. 'They carry each other off time and

again; it's a regular trade with some of the worst rogues, and they hold on for a ransom, ye see. But to seize a white—that's another tune altogether.'

Jack's eye dropped on Mr Mackenzie's arm in its sling. 'How's your arm?' he asked; 'I was no end astonished to hear you'd been attacked.'

'Ye were never more astonished than I was myself,' said the agent. 'If any man had told me this morning that Peter Mackenzie couldn't walk safely about Ho-Chow, I'd have laughed in his face. It's different with the missionaries, for, ye see, the priests are always ready to stir up trouble for them; but I'm as well known as the town gate, and thought I'd as little to fear.'

'How did it happen?' asked Jack.

'Can't tell ye,' said the agent. 'It happened all at once. I just found myself in the middle of a shower of stones, and the biggest of 'em all took me fair on the forearm and cracked it like a bit o' stick. I didn't stop to talk to 'em, I warrant ye. I knew a bit better than that, so I set my long legs to it and ran for my life. Ay, I've been uneasy about ye since the boatman turned up.'

'He got here, then?' cried Jack.

'Oh ay; he got here all right,' returned Mr Mackenzie. 'When yon rogues got up to him, he declared he'd set you down on the bank a

long way back, and they couldn't say otherwise.'

'It was true in a way,' said Jack.

'An' they didn't care to kick up a bobbery for nothing,' went on the agent, 'for the boatman had caught up a big passenger junk and was rowing alongside. So they sheered off, and he saw no more of the rascals. But it's queer they were pursuing ye. Do ye know aught of 'em?'

'A good deal,' said Jack; but he did not open out on the question until they were safely ensconced in the agent's quarters. Then the patrol-leader went fully into the story of the day's adventure.

Mr Mackenzie listened intently. His great local knowledge enabled him to piece things together, and explain all that had seemed dark to the Scouts.

'So-so,' broke out the agent, rubbing his chin and rumpling his hair, a way he had when he was deeply interested. 'So that was the game, was it? This P'eng, ye see, was a famous general, and he'd been sent to this district by the viceroy of the province to take over the military command; but it crept out that he was coming to keep an eye on the old mandarin, for the viceroy had heard he was at his old games again. So, ye see, it's plain that the governor

used the river-pirates to wipe his rival out. An' now he's going to use them to wipe us out! He'll turn a blind eye while they plunder the *hongs*, and then he'll share the loot, an' take good care he gets the lion's share, too!'

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE HONG.

SUDDENLY a call rang out.
'Mackenzie! Mackenzie!' The sound came through the open window of the agent's room, and he sprang up and went towards it.

'That's Nyssens, the Belgian chap who runs the next *hong*,' said Jack to Mackenzie; 'I know his voice. He's shouting over the wall between the compounds.'

'Hallo, Nyssens, is anything wrong?' cried Mackenzie.

'It's very strange,' replied the Belgian, 'but all the Chinese servants have run away. How is it with you?'

Mr Mackenzie turned. 'Jack,' he said, 'you might run along to the boys' quarters and see what they're doing.'

Off shot Jack, and went full speed across the dusky courtyard and sought the rooms of the three natives who lived in the *hong* and waited on Mr Mackenzie. The places were empty. He called their names, and the cry echoed along the walls; no answer was returned.

Jack went back and announced the desertion

here also. Mr Mackenzie's face became grave, and he glanced at Jack. The latter nodded; there was no need for words between them. This looked ugly.

'We'd better see into this,' said Mr Mackenzie; and they went out of the house and across to the wall where Nyssens was standing.

'Ours have cut and run as well,' said Jack. 'When did yours go?'

'I can't say,' replied the Belgian. 'They were here, and then all of a sudden they were not here. I called one of them, and there was no answer. I called again; then went to look for him, and found the servants' quarters empty.'

'Come over the wall,' said Mr Mackenzie, 'and we'll go across to Wallace and see how he stands.'

The Burnet compound stood between two other foreign *hongs*. To its right was a German house of business in charge of Nyssens; to its left an American place, in the hands of a young man named Jim Wallace.

Before they were half-way across the compound they heard Jim Wallace hailing.

'Hello, central!' he sang out, which was his joking way of addressing Mackenzie in the middle *hong*. 'Hello there! Give me central, please!'

'We're just making over your way!' cried Mr Mackenzie.

'That you, Mackenzie? Are your boys at home? My place is a howling desert. My four have hooked it!'

'They've all gone, then?' said Mr Mackenzie. 'I thought as much. Nip over the wall, Wallace, and come into my quarters. I've had news which will let light into this.'

The whole party was soon gathered in Mr Mackenzie's room, where a lamp was burning, and Jim Wallace, a tall, well-built, good-natured young fellow of eight-and-twenty, greeted Jack in cheery fashion.

Nyssens, the Belgian, was a short, stout man of thirty odd. He peered at the company through big, round glasses, and seemed thoroughly puzzled at the turn of affairs.

In two minutes Mr Mackenzie gave Wallace and Nyssens the gist of the news Jack had brought. Jim was much disturbed to hear about Lew, who was a great friend of his; but the Belgian could only think of their present situation.

'But has this to do with the flight of our servants?' asked Nyssens, speaking in his slow and careful English.

'Ay, mon; I should think it has,' replied Mr Mackenzie, with a dry glance at the questioner. 'Don't ye see, our fellows have got wind of

this intended attack, and are off to save their yellow skins.'

'How did they hear of it?' asked Nyssens.

'Now ye must ask me something a wee bit easier,' replied the agent. 'I've often thought the birds o' the air must bring 'em word o' the chatter in the temple courts, where most o' the trouble is brewed. It comes, anyhow, and they've got hold o' it.'

'But this is outrageous!' spluttered the Belgian. 'This is a thing not to be heard of! We may be exposed to great danger!' His voice rose to a yell.

'We may,' replied Mackenzie; and smiled once more his dry smile.

'Let us at once send a messenger to the governor, and say that we demand his protection. That we promise that he shall feel the vengeance of our governments if any violence is offered to us!' bellowed Nyssens.

'Hoots, mon, what's the use o' that?' said the cool, collected Scotsman. 'Why, the old rogue of a governor is at the bottom of it all. Little he'd care for your demands or threats!'

'But some one ought to go to him,' protested Nyssens.

'Well, go yersel',' replied Mackenzie. 'I'll take care no other starts. The streets were dangerous this morn in broad daylight; what will they be

now, when every thievish coolie is licking his chops at the thought of cutting our throats and robbing the *hongs*?’

‘Yes,’ said Wallace soberly; ‘and they’re not going to wait a month of Sundays before they turn up.’

‘Ye’re right, Jim,’ returned the agent. ‘They’ll be knocking at our gates before long—and they’ll knock with broad axes too!’

‘I shall go! I shall go!’ cried Nyssens. ‘There is a small boat lying at our slip. It has oars, and I can use them. I shall go.’

‘What about the stuff in your *hong*?’ asked Jim Wallace.

‘Of what use to lose the stuff and to lose the life also?’ cried Nyssens. ‘I shall leave the town at once!’

‘There’s sense in what he says,’ admitted Mr Mackenzie.—‘Look here, Jack, you go with Nyssens and see him safe. You know the waterways better than he does.’

Jack smiled. ‘What are you and Jim Wallace going to do?’ asked the patrol-leader.

‘Oh, we shall hang on a bit and see how things turn out,’ said the agent.

‘Yes; we might bluff them, after all, and keep them out of the “go-downs,”’ said Jim.

‘While I skedaddle down the river,’ remarked Jack. ‘No, thank you, Mr Mackenzie. I should

get into trouble with the other Eagles. They'd stick beaks and claws into me for that.'

'You talk, but I act,' said Nyssens; and away he scuttled for his boat.

'Which *hong* will they attack first, I wonder?' said Jim.

'This,' replied Mr Mackenzie. 'We lie nearest to the town, and they're pretty well bound to come up to our main front, and try our big gate.'

'What about your door opening on to the canal?' asked Jim.

'That's tremendously strong,' replied the agent, 'but ye might give a look at it, Jack, and make sure all's right. I'm thinking the porter's there yet.'

Jack went, and found the faithful old fellow on guard. He alone of all the native servants had remained at his post. Jack cautioned the man not to draw bolt or bar for any one, and returned to his friends.

'Old Ho is there, and I've told him not to open upon any account,' said Jack.

'Ye've done very wisely,' said Mr Mackenzie; 'but we'll have little trouble there, I'm thinking. It's the main gate they'll break in when the time comes for real business. But, save us all, what's here?'

The exclamation was caused by the sudden

return of Nyssens. The Belgian rushed in, stumbling and reeling, the blood streaming down one side of his face from a great cut over the right temple.

'Are they in?' roared Jim Wallace; and he sprang forward.

'No,' panted Nyssens; 'there was but one, and he fled.'

'How was it?' cried Mr Mackenzie.

'I went through the side-door to the slip, and found the boat had gone.'

'Ha!' cried the agent; 'then they're watching us all round.'

'As I was bending down to look more closely at the mooring-rings,' went on Nyssens, 'a man sprang at me out of the shadows. I know not whence he came, and I felt the edge of a sword sweep along my face. I had my revolver in my hand, and I fired blindly; but it was enough, for I heard him run away. Then I made my way back through the door, secured it, and came here.'

Nyssens mopped his wound busily with a handkerchief. He had really come off very well, ugly as the injury looked; for instead of a square stroke, he had received a slicing cut, which had skimmed along the bone, inflicting a wound more painful than dangerous.

'Now for business,' said Jim. 'I've got a *

five-shot Winchester, but the only cartridges I have for it are loaded with heavy buckshot. I haven't a bullet in the place.'

'And I've got naught but a double-barrelled shot-gun and No. 5 cartridges,' said Mr Mackenzie; 'and that I'll have to make a shift to use one-handed. There's Nyssens got his revolver. Well, it's no sort of an armoury to meet them, but we must e'en do the best we can. Ah, what's yon?'

Crash! It was the sound of a thundering blow on the main gate.

Jim and the agent ran for their weapons. Jack went at full speed to the gate to see what it meant.

The main gate had a small battlemented tower above it, and this tower was gained by a flight of steps running up the inner side of the lofty wall of the compound.

Up the steps bounded Jack, three at a time, and peered out through a place where the bricks had been perforated to form an ornamental pattern. He caught his breath with a gasp. The road between the *hong* and the waterway was a mass of silent figures. They were not still—they flitted to and fro in the dusk; but they moved without a sound, and they had gathered without the besieged gaining the least idea that the moment of attack was so near.

Again and again the crashing strokes were delivered on the iron-banded gate, and Jack sprang to the farther side of the tower, where he could look straight down upon the entrance. He saw the dull gleam of polished steel, and knew that the favourite tactics of the robber bands of China were being employed, the beating in of the gate with heavy axes, to be followed by a savage rush of the assailants.

'There's a loose bit of wall right over the gate,' thought Jack. 'I wonder if I could topple it over on to them? That would stop their game till the others come up.'

He leapt to the spot, and ran his fingers over the bricks till he found the crack he had noticed a few weeks before. Then he put his shoulder against the place and pushed with all his might. It did not give. He turned and put his back to it, and braced his feet against an inner wall within easy reach, and again strained with all his strength to force the broken piece of wall over. Suddenly he felt that it was going, and he dropped to the floor, only just in time to escape going over with it.

Down went the large fragment of masonry, and with its fall the silence of the robber crew was broken. Up rose yells of pain and anger as the heavy bricks crashed upon the heads and shoulders of the men assailing the gate,

At that instant Jim Wallace came up the steps full speed, calling softly, 'Are you there, Jack? What is it?'

'Any number of them just outside,' replied Jack. 'They're trying to knock the gate in. I've just chucked a good lump of the wall on 'em. Hear 'em squeal?'

'Bully for you, Jack,' murmured Jim. 'Now I'll see how they'll stomach a few buckshot.'

He hurried to the spot where Jack had reconnoitred the gate, ran the nose of his Winchester through one of the loopholes and fired three shots into the crowd below, pulling the trigger as fast as he could, and turning the muzzle so that the buckshot swept as wide an area as possible.

'That's peppered 'em a bit,' said Jack, who had followed his friend.

The crowd below was running, and yelling as it scattered. The shower of bricks and the punishing hail of buckshot had been too much for them, and they were in full flight. When Mr Mackenzie and Nyssens came up to the tower the road below was empty.

'Ye've got the rogues on the jump, I can tell,' chuckled Mr Mackenzie. 'Are any left on the ground?'

'No,' said Jack, whose head was over the wall; 'they've all cleared off.'

‘*Ciel*, that is good!’ said Nyssens. ‘It is easy, then, to drive them away. It is well I did not leave my *hong*, after all.’

‘Better not shout till ye’re out o’ the wood,’ said Mr Mackenzie. ‘I’m none so sure we’ve seen the last o’ the yellow rascals.’

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OPENING OF THE GATE.

AT this moment there was a hoarse bellow from the darkness sixty yards away, and a heavy bullet crashed against the gate.

'Hello, the jingals are coming into action,' said Jim Wallace. 'They're clumsy old tools, but for all that we'll do well to keep our heads behind a wall in case a ball should come sailing our way.'

The jingals, the heavy, awkward, native guns, some five or six of them, were fired several times, but did no harm. No attempt was made to reply, for the weapons which the besieged could muster were of no service at the range.

'There's no place where they can slip in quietly on us while we're kept here, is there?' said Jim Wallace. 'The three *hongs* cover a good deal of ground, you see.'

'Just what I was thinking, Jim,' said Jack. 'Suppose I keep on the move round, while you stay here. I know every corner of all of them.'

'Ay, that's a fine idea,' remarked Mr Mackenzie; 'and, Jack, give a good look to that water-side

of Nyssen's *hong*. If ye see aught suspicious raise a cry.'

'You'll hear my whistle,' said Jack, 'and that will be better still.'

The patrol-leader ran at once to inspect the door near which Nyssens had been attacked. It was all right, the bars were in position. He went swiftly round the walls and peered into the windows of the 'go-downs;' everything was dark and silent—there seemed no sign of life on this side of the *hongs*.

'Now for Jim's place,' thought the Scout, and swung himself up to the wall which divided the compounds.

Jack's only weapon was a heavy stick, and he ~~was~~ about to fling this down on the farther side and leap after it, when he paused. He sat for a moment, without moving, astride the wall, alert and attentive. He heard nothing; he saw nothing; but in a Scout every sense must be on the alert, and the patrol-leader of the Eagles most certainly smelt something. There was a noisome odour in the air. What could it mean?

Then Jack made one spring back into the compound he had just left, and raced across it at full speed. He knew! it had flashed upon him, and he saw it all. Three parts of the way across the compound there was a large grating into which rubbish was thrown, and to which all

the dirty water ran. From this grating a sewer ran to the creek outside. Had some one crept along the sewer, raised the grating, and gained admittance to the courtyard? The disturbing of the sewer would fill the air with this unpleasant smell, and a light breeze was blowing directly towards him.

Yes; Jack was right. As he flew up to the place he saw, in the dim light, that the grating was raised, and now there rose from the depths of the sewer a round, pale object, something like a huge egg. Jack knew it for the bare, shaven skull of a Chinaman, and he whirled aloft his heavy stick and brought it down with tremendous force on the head of the enemy, who had been about to creep from the hidden passage.

So swift and heavy was the blow that the invader dropped without a sound; and Jack seized the grating and threw it down again, and leapt upon it to hold it in place by his weight. He drew a deep breath as he thought how close a call it had been. Once a man was inside, he could draw the bars of the door and admit those who lurked without.

Then Jack's heart gave a great jerk within his body. Click!—a bar slid back. There was a man inside! He was now at the door and twenty yards away! It was a second man whom Jack

had felled; the first had already left the sewer and rushed to his work.

Out sprang Jack, and raced for the door with breathless haste. There were two bolts—one easy, one very stiff. The easy bolt had been drawn. 'Could the Scout gain the place before the stiff one had been released from its socket?

As Jack darted up to the portal, he saw a figure crouched against the lower part of the door. It was the robber trying to force the lower bolt back. The thief did not look up as the Boy Scout swept upon him; he thought it was his companion of the sewer coming to his aid.

'Help me to pull,' he grunted.

Jack helped him to a swinging blow from the club, and the Chinaman reeled back. But as he went the bolt came free. He had done his work, and the door was at once thrust violently open.

Jack caught a glimpse of a score of frightful faces packed about the narrow opening. One of them carried a torch, and its red light shone on the shining naked bodies and the horrible masked heads of the river-pirates. At their head was a gigantic figure, which Jack knew well—Ah Foo. He and a picked band of his ruffians were bursting in at this break in the defences.

It was but a glimpse that Jack caught of these fierce assailants. They charged wildly forward and were upon him as he raised his stick. He was hurled to the ground in their mad rush, and they trampled over him with naked feet and passed on.

The torch-bearer was in the midst of the party, and the light had not fallen once on the Scout; hence he was passed unrecognised. The attackers thought it was one of themselves who had fallen in the scuffle and hurry of bursting in, and left him to get up how he could.

In an instant Jack pulled himself together, and sprang to his feet. What a chance of escape he now possessed!

He saw the open door, but the thought of slipping off through it did not cross his mind. His duty was too plain and clear for him to think of aught else. He must warn his friends at the gate.

He put his whistle to his lips, and now, for a second, he did hesitate. To blow the call would betray his presence at once, and the river-wolves would discover that one of their hated enemies was within almost arm's length of them, and, more, was bringing to naught their hopes of a surprise.

Could he get ahead of them silently, and warn his friends? No, he could not—he saw it all

too clearly. He must choose between himself and his friends. The choice was made without another instant of hesitation, and he faced the frightful danger. Again the whistle went to his lips, and high and shrill rose the call, piercing far through the night with its keen note of warning.

With the first sound of the patrol-whistle the pirates stopped, and their rush was changed to a confusion of movements and murmuring. But their leader was prompt to act. He snatched the torch from the hand of its bearer and came leaping back towards the gate. He was followed by half-a-dozen of his band, the red light flashing from their spears and swords.

Jack turned to fly. Too late! He was seized in a fierce grip. The man who had drawn the bars—he who had reeled from the heavy blow—had recovered himself. He had sprung upon the Scout, and now held him in an iron grip.

At this moment of desperate peril, all would have been swiftly over with Jack Burnet had he not been a skilful wrestler. He gave a little, and tripped his assailant. The man reeled, and Jack secured a hold. It was enough; the man was still a little abroad from the tremendous crack he had received, and the Scout wrenched himself free. Only just in time. As he leapt away, the pirate captain bounded up to the place.



He was seized in a fierce grip.

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Ah Foo saw the flying figure, knew it, and raced after Jack in hot pursuit. But Jack's escape was certain, for he was upon ground he knew perfectly, and he had already planned a movement which would baffle the chase.

He flew at top speed for a narrow passage between two 'go-downs,' shot along it, turned to the right, and raced up a flight of outside steps, which led to an upper loft. From the head of these steps it was easy to spring on to the wall which divided the compounds, and he gained the wall, swung himself over, and dropped lightly into their own enclosure. He looked round, but all was quiet here.

'Ah Foo's rascals are waiting for their leader,' thought Jack. 'And he is busy beating round the "go-downs" for me. Good! that gives me a few moments;' and Jack ran as hard as he could for the main gate, where a tremendous uproar had broken out anew.

He had not gone twenty yards, when he saw a dark figure approaching from the opposite direction.

'Who are you?' cried the new-comer.

'Hallo, Jim!' said Jack. 'That you?'

'Yes,' replied Jim Wallace. 'What's wrong, Jack? What did the whistle mean?'

'Meant that Ah Foo and his gang are in Nyssens' *hong*,' replied the patrol-leader, 'and

they'll be up at the main gate in no time. Hear 'em?'

At this moment there was a murmur of voices, then a strong call of command in the courtyard beyond the wall. Ah Foo had returned to his troop, and was leading them forward once more.

Jim Wallace gave a whistle and raced back step and step with Jack. The latter went up the tower three steps at a time, and called Mr Mackenzie, and told him the news.

'Up to my house,' said the cool Scotsman; 'that's the only place where we can defend ourselves. They'll cut us up here in two twos if yon rogues are safely in!'

'They are that,' said Jack, as Mackenzie and Nyssens hurried after him down the stairs.

As they gained the foot, Jim's weapon cracked twice; for there was a dark group of hurrying forms coming towards him as he held the foot of the steps, and he blazed away into the thick of them. The stinging buckshot made their mark, and the pirates yelled as the heavy pellets scoured them; and for a moment the charge was checked. This moment gave the besieged a chance of retreat in the dusk, and away they went for the agent's house.

'Our chance to slip off will come while they are plundering the "go-downs,"' murmured Mr Mackenzie.

Jim Wallace growled, 'Confound the yellow thieves!'

'We mustn't forget old Ho,' said Jack; 'he's watching the water-side door. I'll fetch him up.'

'You're right, Jack,' said the agent. 'He'd slipped from my mind. Jim and I will hurry up to the house and barricade it a bit. We've got a little while, for a certainty. Those scamps will open the main gate and let their friends in before they come in search of us again.'

The little company now parted, Mr Mackenzie and Jim Wallace pushing straight on for the house, while Jack turned back a few steps and hurried across to that corner of the big courtyard where a passage ran down to the water-side door.

Suddenly Jack heard some one running after him. He glanced over his shoulder, and saw Nyssens at his heels. The Belgian had been a little behind the rest, and had followed Jack instead of the other two.

'Go up to the house,' said Jack; 'that's the spot we're going to hold. I'm only fetching some one.'

'I will come, too,' grunted Nyssens.

The Belgian had got the idea into his head, that Jack knew his way about better than any one, and was probably escaping. If so, he would keep close to him, and profit by his knowledge.

Jack took no more notice of the fat Belgian, but went ahead and gained the mouth of the passage. At the foot of it there was a tremendous din. This entrance also was being assailed, and axes were ringing on the nail-studded door.

CHAPTER XIX.

CUT OFF!

JACK sprang into the passage, ran down it, and found the old porter, standing with his lantern, watching the assailed door. He told him to go up to the house at once. He went away, and Jack spent a few seconds in tightening the rattling bolts.

He turned, and a single glance up the passage told him that it was full time for him to go; for there, framed in its mouth, was a bunch of figures, lighted by three or four torches, hurrying across the courtyard straight for the opening. It was a small band of the robbers, hastening to open this door also to admit their friends.

He tore up the passage at top speed. It was touch-and-go between being caught like a rat in trap or getting free, so frightfully close was the plump of torches, in whose red light swords and spears glittered with dreadful threat. And Jack would scarcely have escaped had not the attention of the robber band been drawn aside for a moment; they saw a hurrying figure with a lamp, and turned aside to pursue it. It was the old porter; he was cut down at once, and the

men then came on again towards the passage. But the tiny interval had served to see the patrol-leader freed from the narrow way. Beside the mouth of it was a large cart-shed, where ten or a dozen of the clumsy vehicles used to carry loads in China were standing in rows three or four deep. In among these Jack slipped and crouched in hiding. Let the Chinese but once pour down the passage, and he would be free to make a dash across the great courtyard for the house.

Jack had no idea what had caused the momentary diversion which had enabled him to get clear of the passage; he had only seen the band swerve aside for a moment.

But the marauders halted at the mouth of the narrow way, and only one torch disappeared; the rest cast a flaring light around, and the Scout did not dare to move.

Presently the water-side door was flung open, and a mob of howling ruffians poured up into the compound, and spread itself abroad in search of plunder. Many carried torches. Not one glanced towards the cart-shed where Jack lay hidden; there was nothing in the rude vehicles to tempt them. They were burning to lay their thievish fingers on the goods in the well-stored 'go-downs.'

Suddenly, with a start, Jack thought of Nyssens.

'Where's Nyssens?' he reflected. 'He was at

my shoulder. What's come to him, I wonder? He'd clean gone out of my mind.'

A deep, hollow groan came from a slight distance away.

'Whew!' breathed the Scout to himself. 'That must be Nyssens. They've got Nyssens.'

For several minutes he lay close in the friendly shelter of the carts, until the robbers in his neighbourhood scattered and went in various directions.

Now Jack moved cautiously into the open, and headed for the place where he fancied the wounded man lay. In a moment he caught sight of a heap on the ground. He ran up to the place, and found the porter trying to struggle to his feet. The robbers had wounded him severely; but he was still alive.

'It's poor old Ho,' muttered Jack; 'it isn't Nyssens, after all. And he's badly hurt, too.'

The Scout was bending over the porter, when suddenly a storm of yells and cries rolled across the compound, and the sound of shots rang out. He paused, and stood for a moment to consider this turn of affairs. The house was being assailed; it would not be safe to approach it. Then he heard chattering voices a short distance away, their owners apparently coming towards the spot where he stood.

'Into the stable,' murmured Jack; 'it's empty, and there's no temptation for looters there.'

He bent, seized the old Chinaman under the arms, and dragged him back towards the side of the courtyard. The stable stood next to the cartshed, and the door in its mud wall was standing ajar. In he went, and Jack shaped for the far side where a corner had been railed off, and would afford a little cover.

He stumbled across the uneven floor, hauling at his burden, and murmured, 'Steady, steady!' as he almost fell on catching his foot against a projecting stone. In his preoccupation he admonished himself half-aloud.

'Ach! it is good that you spoke,' said a voice which made him jump. Nyssens was hiding in the darkness of the stable.

'Hallo, Nyssens, are you there?' said Jack.

'Yes; I ran in here when I saw the robbers close at hand,' replied the Belgian. 'I was now getting ready to shoot when you say, "Steady."'

'Good job you didn't,' returned Jack dryly. 'I've got poor old Ho here. The brutes hacked him down on sight.'

'Is he killed?' asked Nyssens.

'Oh no,' replied Jack; 'but just how much he is hurt I can't say. I'll lay him down behind the partition and I'll strike a match.'

'No, no!' said Nyssens; 'the light may be seen, and attract the attention of these blood-thirsty people.'

'I don't think so,' said Jack; 'anyhow, I'm not going to let the old chap bleed to death.'

The old porter was placed along the foot of the partition, and Jack struck a match and looked at him. He had only one wound, but that was a very nasty one—a severe cut square across the scalp. Jack bound it up as well as he could with his handkerchief. The old man now became conscious, and spoke to him. Ho knew his assailant, and named him; it was a coolie in the employ of Jim Wallace, a man who knew that Ho had remained faithful to his trust, and had struck him down as soon as the light of the torches had told the thieves who it was.

When Jack had entered the stable they had left the door partly open as they found it; he thought it would look much less suspicious than if it were tightly closed. Now a strong red light poured into the stable, and the three in hiding lay almost without breathing. Jack had his eye at a crack in the partition, and he saw a man enter with a blazing torch. The Chinaman was followed by three others, and the plunderers cast but a single glance around the place.

'Only a stable,' cried their leader, 'and empty of animals. Nothing to be had here.'

'I told you so,' called out a man behind

him. 'The "go-down" is on the other side of the courtyard. Let us hurry there before all is gone.'

The advice seemed good, for the party turned and went, and silence and darkness fell on the relieved group lying under cover of the friendly partition.

'Ach!' murmured Nyssens, 'if they had only walked round the place!' and he shuddered.

Jack took no notice of the Belgian's remark. He had raised his head, and was listening intently. 'It seems all quiet round here now those chaps have gone,' he murmured. 'I'm going out to do a bit of scouting.'

'What for?' asked Nyssens.

'To see if the water-side door is deserted. If it is, there's a road out for us, and old Ho's son lives within a short distance. We'll strike for his place; I know it well.'

He slipped away into the darkness, and crossed cautiously towards the door. The latter was gained, and all seemed quiet in the immediate neighbourhood. On the farther side of the courtyard a yelling mob was thronging about the warehouses, and Jack hoped that all had been attracted to the plunder.

He crept to the passage, listened, and looked. He glanced across towards the agent's house. The tumult had died away there, and no shots

were being fired. What had happened? Had the place been carried?

Jack hoped in his heart that his friends had escaped; but everything was horribly uncertain, and nothing more uncertain than the venture which now lay before him. He must run the length of the passage to see if there was a guard outside; and how if he were intercepted, or his return blocked by a party coming out?

'It's got to be done,' breathed Jack to himself; and dived straight into the blackness of the passage and bounded down.

He gained the door and glanced out. A group of Chinese stood about twenty yards away; one of them held a lantern, and Jack counted seven men talking earnestly together. He watched them closely for a couple of minutes, and saw no sign that they carried weapons. He turned and went swiftly back to the stable, and told Nyssens what he had seen.

'Is there danger from those men?' asked Nyssens.

'Hard to say,' replied Jack. 'They may be only a band of lookers-on, just idlers, ready enough to lay their claws on anything that comes handy, but not bound to attack us.'

'I do not think this is a safe place to stop too long in,' remarked the Belgian.

'You're right,' replied Jack. 'When the "go-

downs" have been cleared, the mob will swarm into every corner on the chance of picking up a trifle. There'll be scores in here before another hour has gone.'

'Yes, yes,' said Nyssens. 'I think so too. Come, come, we will go.'

'We'll get Ho on his legs and see how he marches,' said Jack. 'If he can't hobble, I'll take his shoulders, and you, Nyssens, can take his legs.'

The Belgian gave a snort in which anger and astonishment were mingled. 'What is that you say?' he growled. '"Nyssens take his legs!" *Sacrebleu!* Nyssens will take his own legs, and no other man's. What! you would load us with an old Chinaman, when we must make all haste to secure our safety?'

'Of course, he's got to come,' replied Jack. 'It's clear he's a marked man for staying with us. We're bound to see him to a safe place. Why, if he was found here, he'd be knocked on the head in short order, and they wouldn't make any half-job of it this time.'

'But our escape is ten times—what do I say?—it is fifty times more certain without him—without the drag of an old, wounded, helpless fellow!' protested Nyssens fiercely. 'I tell you he must, he shall be left behind!'

'He's got to go,' said Jack quietly.

'Why? Why?' demanded Nyssens fiercely. 'He is not a white man; he is only an old Chinaman. There are millions of him to be had. What is one more or less of them? Why risk all lives for him?'

'For one thing,' remarked Jack, 'because I'm a Boy Scout, Nyssens.'

'Boy Scout!' snarled the Belgian. 'Boy fool! Boy idiot! that's what you are!'

'All right,' said Jack. 'Suppose you clear out and leave me to look after my own business?'

'Ach! but I don't know the way,' replied Nyssens with selfish promptness.

This was true. Nyssens had not been long in Ho-Chow, and he had been so terrified at the tales he had heard of the anti-foreign mob of the city, that he had hardly stirred from the *hong*.

'The way's easy enough to find,' said Jack. 'Turn to the right, and you'll come to a bridge over the canal within forty yards. Cross the bridge and go ahead, and the road will take you straight down to the river. There you can get a boat, if you'll pay well for it, and be off to Wushan.'

'Then I go,' snorted Nyssens; and he hurried at once from the stable.

CHAPTER XX.

A SURPRISE.

THE Boy Scout paid no more attention to the deserter, but turned to the porter and spoke to him. The old man was quite conscious, and answered feebly. Jack picked him up, and told him that he was going to try and reach his son's house. He attempted to walk, and though he had lost a good deal of blood, he could move along slowly, with Jack's strong arm under his shoulder.

But scarcely had they taken a dozen steps across the uneven floor, when some one scurried in at the door, tripped in his haste over some projecting stone, and came down headlong. The fallen man uttered a low growl and an exclamation in French, and he knew that Nyssens had come back.

'Say, Nyssens, hold up, man,' murmured a voice which Jack knew well.

'Jim! Jim!' breathed the Scout joyfully. 'You are here, too! Have you escaped from the house?'

'Escaped all right, Jack,' replied Jim Wallace, 'and Mackenzie too. But I've lost him in the

dark, and as I was heading for your side-door I came on Nyssens in retreat, and accompanied him.'

'There are men in the passage,' said the Belgian, 'and they are searching with torches among the carts in the shed.'

This was desperately bad news. Not only was their escape cut off, but the general prying round had begun. There was nothing for it but to return to their hiding-place; so back they went.

They were barely in cover when a strong red light shone into the stable, and Jack, who was next the partition, clapped his eye to a crack, which gave him a view of the door. In glided a figure, moving without sound on its naked feet, and holding the torch on high as it peered round the place.

Jack caught his breath. It was one of their most dreaded enemies, a river-pirate. The demon mask, the shining spear held in the right hand, marked him out as one of the river-wolves. Was their escape suspected, or was a general search being made for them?

The Scout waited eagerly to see how many of the enemy were present. The figure stepped forward, and then paused again. There was no sign of a companion, and Jack breathed a little more freely.

The pirate was moving about the farther end

of the big stable, peering into corners and looking closely everywhere. Suddenly he turned and glanced towards the partition. Jack saw the man's black eyes glitter through the holes in the mask—a mask painted to look like one of those demons who torment sinners, as shown in the pictures hung in a Buddhist temple—a horrible, fearsome mask.

For a moment the pirate gazed towards the partition, then came straight to it. The swiftly advancing light told all who crouched behind it that their hiding-place was about to be discovered. As the light grew stronger, something glittered and shone; it was Nyssens' silver-plated revolver. He held it at arm's length before him, ready to fire at the man now close upon them.

All eyes were fixed upon the point where they expected the masked Chinaman, and yet he came into sight with so swift and silent a glide that he seemed to appear suddenly and unexpectedly. As the light of his torch fell upon the group behind the partition, he uttered a quick, low cry, followed by a couple of words in Chinese.

In response to this cry, Jack Burnet leapt out with wonderful speed. But to Jim's immense amazement, he did not spring upon the pirate; he bounded instead upon Nyssens, clutched the Belgian's shooting arm, and jerked it fiercely upwards.

He was barely in time. Nyssens' finger was already crooked on the trigger; the revolver cracked, and the bullet sped, but it landed among the rafters of the roof, and did no harm.

'Hold hard, Nyssens,' said Jack coolly. 'We haven't so many friends in the place that we can afford to shoot one on sight.'

'A friend!' spluttered the Belgian, who had been taken aback by Jack's assault. 'That man a friend?'

'He is,' said Jack in an emphatic tone; 'and none more useful, I'll warrant.'

'Who is it?' called Jim in an eager whisper.

'It's a chap named Wong,' replied Jack; 'and the first word in his mouth was to say that he came as a friend.' He turned to the fisherman, and they began to talk in Wong's own speech.

'Who is with you, Wong?' asked Jack.

'No one,' replied the fisherman. 'There is no one whom I could trust. The people here are very bitter against the foreigners.'

'Who were the men in the passage a little while ago. Are they near here still?'

'Oh no. They were men from the town, hurrying into the *hongs*. The way out is clear at this moment.'

Jack translated this answer to his friends, and up leapt Nyssens, and was off like a shot.

'Where is that man going?' asked Wong.

'He is going to escape while the way is clear,' replied Jack.

'Call him back,' said Wong; 'he is running into much danger. The way is clear to leave the *hong*, but there are many bad men in the streets. He will be attacked as soon as they see he is a foreigner.'

Jack called to Nyssens; but the Belgian paid no attention to the warning, and vanished in the dusk of the courtyard.

The fisherman had a bundle slung by a cord round his shoulders, and he now flung it on the ground and opened it. He turned out three or four native gowns, folded round a couple of broad straw hats.

'Put those on,' he said to Jack, 'and you may go where you please.'

Jack thanked him again and again, and turned to Jim. But Jim had already grasped the situation.

'Say, Jack,' he murmured, 'the little man's brought these to disguise us, I reckon.'

'That's it,' said Jack. 'Slide into 'em.'

In a trice they had donned a long gown each, and clapped on a broad hat; at a glance they looked Chinese, and in the dusky night no one would recognise them for what they were.

'This is splendid, Wong,' said Jack. 'How can we thank you for this help?'

The fisherman bowed his head and replied, 'I would do a hundred times as much for him who saved my son.'

'How did you get these gowns?' asked Jack. 'They are scholars' gowns.'

Wong chuckled. 'None are more bitter against the foreigners than the scholars,' said he. 'And when the gates were opened, a band of poor scholars rushed in to share the plunder. They flung their gowns in a corner in order that they might climb and struggle with greater ease, and I took what I wanted.'

'How did you know I was in the *hong*?' asked Jack.

'These things become known,' replied Wong evasively, and Jack, knowing how secretive the Chinaman is in respect of the sources of his knowledge, did not push the question home. 'When I saw you were not in the house, I began to search for you, and secured these garments on the way,' added Wong.

The question of the transport of Ho was settled at once by Wong taking the old man on his back, while Jack carried the fisherman's spear. The torch was extinguished, and they marched out of the stable, down the passage and out into the lane beyond. They passed several groups, but attracted not the least notice, for they had a most innocent look: what could appear more

natural than a group bearing away a wounded friend? They reached the house of the porter's son in safety, knocked, and were admitted when the old man spoke to his son, who came to the door.

The son was greatly disturbed to see his father in this condition, and poured a flood of maledictions on the heads of the rioters, and a torrent of thanks upon those who had brought him to a place of safety. He looked a little askance at Wong, who had taken off his mask and hung it at his girdle; but a few words from Jack reassured him, and he begged them to rest awhile, and stay and eat with him before they went farther on their way.

Jack and Jim sat on a broad wooden bench, and Wong squatted on his heels and awaited their pleasure. The three were alone, for the old man had been carried off to an inner room.

Now the thought of Lew Standing, his lost companion, was scarcely for an instant out of Jack's mind, even in the midst of his own adventures, and he began eagerly to question Wong. The fisherman looked on the ground and did not answer for a time.

'He knows something,' thought Jack; 'but he is not willing to speak.'

'It is Lew Standing they have got hold of,' said Jack. 'Come, Wong, you ought to be willing

to do all you can to help him; he saved your little girl.'

Wong shrugged his shoulders; it was characteristic of his race that this appealed slightly to him. Jack pressed him again, and promised Wong a handsome reward. At last the fisherman spoke.

'Oh yes,' he said, 'he has been taken. I know that, though I had nothing to do with it. I knew nothing of it until I came to Ho-Chow this evening. He was seized by two brothers of the Yen family. They were obeying the orders of Ah Foo. He learned that you were on the road to Ho-Chow, and laid plans to capture you both, but only one was seized.'

Jack sprang from his seat in excitement. 'Look here, Wong,' he said, 'I believe you know where Lew is at this moment. Do you?'

The yellow face of the little Chinaman remained fixed and inscrutable for some moments; then he looked up and said quietly, 'I do.'

'I was sure of it!' Jack cried.

His eyes flashed with delight to think that he was about to learn Lew's fate.

'Where is he?' he cried. 'Where is he?'

'Lew is quite near Ho-Chow,' replied the fisherman. 'He was taken to a house belonging to the Yen family, a small house in a village beside the river.'

'What's in the wind, Jack?' sang out Jim.
'You seem kinder stirred up.'

'It's about Lew, Jim,' Jack replied quickly.
'This man knows where he is; he's in a house near this city.'

Jim leapt to his feet in turn. 'Say,' he cried, 'think it's a fact, Jack?'

'I do,' said Jack; and he turned to Wong again. 'Wong,' he said, 'you must take us to the place. He must be rescued. If it is a small house, it can easily be broken into. How many are there guarding him?'

'Those who seized him,' replied Wong.

'Would they give him up quietly if they were paid?' said Jack, knowing how powerful is a little money to gain your way in China.

'No,' replied the fisherman; 'they fear Ah Foo.'

'Ah Foo, that old villain!' rejoined Jack. 'He is only a washerman turned pirate.'

'No, master,' said Wong earnestly. 'He is neither washerman nor pirate, save when he pleases. He is a very strange and dangerous man. He is a greater man than we know; he is many things.'

'What sort of things?' asked Jack.

'For one, he is a Selected Man,' replied Wong. Jack whistled.

'What is it?' asked Jim.

'Ah Foo's a *chü-jên*—a 'Selected Man!' replied his friend.

'What's that?' queried Jim.

'It's one of the highest literary degrees,' returned Jack—'a sort of double-first in China.'

Jim did not seem much impressed.

'Well,' he remarked, 'why open your eyes? I don't see anything wonderful in a college man sliding down into a hoodlum; it happens now and again.'

'But, my dear chap,' said Jack, 'you don't grip the sense of the thing. A graduate of that class simply can't become a hoodlum in China; his degree lifts him out of it. Why, a scholar has got the ladder open to him as no other man has; he may easily become a mandarin; the highest posts in the empire are within his reach.'

'Why isn't Ah Foo shinning it up the top rungs, then?' asked Jim. 'It's a lot safer to rob folks as a mandarin than as a pirate.'

'Can't say,' replied Jack; 'it's a mystery, and a much greater mystery than his doubling the parts of washerman and river-wolf.'

'What's the line now, Jack?' asked Jim.

'Down to the river and into a boat, if we can get hold of one,' replied the patrol-leader. 'Wong will come with us and show us the house.'

'That's good enough,' returned Jim in tones

grimly quiet; 'then we'll interview the fellows who have got hold of Lew Standing.'

'And if we could get Lew clear, we'd all jump on board again and pull for Wushan,' said Jack. 'I don't know whether Wong could help us in getting a boat here. I expect not; he's off his beat.'

Jack spoke to the fisherman in Chinese, and received a reply.

'No,' went on Jack; 'he doesn't know any river people in Ho-Chow; we shall have to get old Ho's son to lend us a hand.'

At this moment the man of whom they were speaking came in, carrying a tray with three steaming bowls upon it. The bowls were filled with rice, served with bean curd.

While they ate, Jack talked with Ho's son, and found that he had a friend a boatman, who would be glad to take them down the river if well paid for it.

'That's the beauty of China,' remarked Jack to Jim. 'You can get a job done anywhere if you'll pay well for it; but in the Flowery Land they're just tumbling over one another to serve you if a string of cash hangs to the job.'

'We must have men,' said Ho's son, 'to guard us while going down to the river.'

Jack nodded. 'I see,' he replied, 'the streets are not safe except for a band.'

'They are not,' said the young Chinaman. 'Two or three may be assailed, for many bad characters are abroad to-night.'

'Where can we get a few people?' asked Jack.

'There are two young men who work for me, and I can ask some neighbours,' he replied.

'How much will they want?'

Ho's son reflected. 'One hundred cash apiece will be plenty,' he said at last.

'We'll give it; fetch 'em up,' answered the patrol-leader.

Ho's son went away, and Jim glanced across at Wong, who was whipping the rice into his mouth with a pair of 'nimble sons,' as the Chinese call chop-sticks.

'I wonder why little Wong turned a blood-thirsty pirate?' said Jim. 'Look at him sitting there, as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.'

'Ah,' rejoined Jack, 'let's see what he's got to say.—Wong,' he went on, falling into the dialect, 'why did you join the river-wolves?'

Wong wrinkled his forehead reflectively. 'Well,' he said slowly, 'I had lost my boat, and could not earn a living. The man who has nothing must become a beggar or a robber. I became a robber. I should not like the beggar's life.'

He stated his case quite simply, and gave a little nod as he finished speaking, as if there was

nothing more to be said in the way of explanation or defence.

'He'd got nothing else to do,' said Jack to Jim. 'That's how he puts it.'

Jim chuckled and returned to his rice, and so did Wong. Jack was so excited that he could scarcely eat; every moment seemed an hour till he could start out in hopes of rescuing his friend and Brother Scout.

Within twenty minutes their host returned to say that the men were in the courtyard—six of them, and each was armed with a stout bamboo staff. He advised that they should not let the men know who they were. He had told his friends that two strangers were leaving the town, and wished to be conducted to the river-side.

'Good!' said Jack. 'Here's a couple of dollars; pay 'em now, and bring me the balance of the money in strings of cash.'

This was done, and Jack and Jim having resumed their disguises, all was then ready for the start. Ho's son conducted them down a narrow passage into a small and very dusky courtyard, where a group of men awaited them. Jack greeted them in Chinese, and received a respectful murmur in reply; they were all very pleased with the pay they were getting for this simple task.

Upon the farther side of the courtyard a door

opened into a narrow by-lane, and into this the little procession filed at once. Ho's son had divided the bodyguard into two groups; three went ahead, three followed behind. Jack and Jim walked together; Wong and Ho's son followed them. As the bodyguard marched along, they rattled their sticks on the causeway to strike terror into those who might be abroad, and one of them clanked a piece of chain. This fellow was a humorous dog, who had hit upon a capital notion.

'You see,' he explained to the others, 'when an important official walks abroad some of his attendants carry chains to bind a rogue they may seize. If people hear this chain they will think a mandarin is coming, and fly out of the way.'

This idea gave great delight to all except Jim, who had to stay outside the joke he would have so much relished, since Jack did not dare attempt an explanation of the mirth.

Jack and his party approached the river by the most unfrequented ways, and on the road met only one gang of riotous coolies. These were scared by the funny man; he clanked his chain, and the coolies began to move aside quickly. His comrades backed him up by rattling their sticks on the ground; then the coolies cut for their lives, thinking it was a mandarin and his guard.

The river-bank was gained, and Ho's son went away to find his friend. The rest of the party halted, and stood in silence beside a lofty wall. Presently the sound of a disturbance in a lane near at hand came to their ears; a number of Chinese were yelling and apparently fighting, and the uproar came nearer and nearer.

Jack and his companions kept perfectly still and quiet, hoping that the noisy quarrellers would pass and leave them undisturbed. Soon a small crowd tumbled out of the mouth of the lane and came along the river road. One man seemed to be the leader; at any rate, they heard his tremendous voice rising above the din.

'Bring them along!' he was roaring. 'Bring them along! We will take them to the Yamen, brothers. We shall have a reward. Yes, I tell you, we shall have a reward.'

The little mob was marching by, when there came from the midst of it a voice that made Jack and his companion jump in their shoes.

'Mackenzie! Mackenzie!' it cried. 'I am in dreadful pain; they are wrenching my arms from their sockets. Tell them in their own language that I will come quietly.'

* 'No use to talk to them, Nyssens,' came the voice of the agent. 'They would be delighted to learn you were in torture.'

Jim seized Jack's arm in a convulsive grip.

Their friends were in the hands of these rioters, and were being dragged to prison. It was a strange and striking meeting. They stood in safety and silence, while Mr Mackenzie and Nyssens were captives.

Then Jack summoned to his aid a most powerful weapon, and used it. He stepped forward, raised his voice, and called on the mob to stop. He made his voice as harsh as he could, and his words rang out at an instant when there was a break in the tumult, and all heard them.

The mob came to a stand at once; the words had checked them instantly. For Jack could not only speak the local dialect, but he had command also of correct Chinese speech—the ‘mandarin talk,’ the polished and classical language of the court and official edicts. He had picked up the dialect easily enough from the native servants, but the gaining of the language of the ‘Four Books’ had been a heart-breaking task under the direction of a Chinese tutor. But now Jack was to reap a rich reward for those hours of bitter toil.

Not only had his ‘mandarin talk’ deeply impressed the mob, but it had had a great effect on his own escort. They began to think that they were guarding a much more important personage than they had supposed, and they

rattled their sticks and the chain was clanked to impress the rioters still further. The latter now felt certain that they were in the presence of at least a high official and his bodyguard, and their leader called out, 'We have taken two of the "foreign devils," excellency. We are now bringing them to the Yamen.'

'Where did you seize them?' demanded Jack, weighing every tone in his mind before he spoke, in order that there might not be the slightest flaw in his speech.

'We found them lurking in a shed near the river-bank.'

'You have done well, men; you will receive the thanks of the governor. We must clear our city of these people.'

And now arose a conversation between the captives which caused Jim to clap both hands over his mouth lest he should yell with laughter.

'Who is this, Mackenzie?' said Nyssens. 'Some one has stopped these rough men.'

'Some big-wig or other on his rounds with a guard,' replied Mr Mackenzie.

'How do you know he's a big-wig in the dark?' asked Nyssens.

'His speech bewrayeth him,' chuckled the agent dryly. 'He is using "mandarin talk," the high Chinese, not spoken by the common people.'

'Speak with him, then,' cried Nyssens. 'Tell him that our governments will cause him to be punished unless he sees that we are treated properly.'

'Not much good, I'm afraid, to talk to him,' replied Mackenzie. 'He's dead against us; I can tell by what he says. He's "anti-foreign."'

The 'anti-foreigner' grinned to himself, and when the agent addressed him in fluent Chinese, pointing out that the wrath of the foreign ambassadors at Peking would be aroused by this outrage on their fellow-subjects, Jack played up to his part by silencing him with a few contemptuous words.

'No good,' said Mr Mackenzie to Nyssens. 'He's the usual idiot, inflated with his own importance, and looking on us as barbarians.'

Upon hearing this, Jack and Jim had to cough for a moment; then Jack summoned his harshest tones once more, and ordered the leader of the mob to hand over the captives. He was at once obeyed, for the men were a number of Chinese carters, people of the lowest class, very stupid and ignorant, and abjectly obedient in the face of the smallest show of authority.

Nyssens had his hands bound behind him, and Mr Mackenzie had a rope fast about his sound wrist; the other arm was, of course in a sling, and the Chinese had left that alone. The

Yellow who had urged Nyssens on had been amusing himself by jerking the rope on high, and dragging Nyssens' arms upwards and backwards, thus causing the Belgian the most acute pain.

Jack ordered Wong to take the rope which bound Mr Mackenzie, and Ho's son took Nyssens in charge. Then Jack gave the leader of the mob several strings of cash to distribute among his followers, and bade them all be gone.

Full of delight at receiving the hoped-for reward, away they scuttled, and were lost at the next moment in the depths of the lane from which they had swarmed out.

CHAPTER XXI

LEW'S PRISON.

'FORWARD,' grunted Jack, and the march for the water-side was resumed.

As they went, he gripped Jim tightly by the arm, and gave him a warning shake. It was most important that not the least hint of the truth should be given to their bodyguard; not so much for their own sakes—they would soon be free of the city—but lest harm should come to the young Chinaman who was helping them to escape. Jim understood, and the little procession went forward in silence, save for Nyssens' groans and complaints. Soon they stood beside the river, and here at a little wharf was moored a sampan beside a tiny cabin.

Ho's son handed Nyssens' rope to Jim, and went into the cabin. He was back in a moment, carrying a pair of oars. He put them in the sampan, and drew the skiff in by its painter.

'Here is the boat, excellency,' he said to Jack.

'Put the prisoners in the bow,' commanded Jack, 'and you will watch over them.—Wong, it will be your task to use the oars. We will sit in the stern.'

'What is this, Mackenzie?' cried Nyssens. 'Are they going to pull us out into the stream to drown us?'

'I don't expect so,' replied the agent. 'More likely to take us down to the Yamen; it stands quite near to the river, about half a mile lower down.'

Reassured by this reply, the Belgian scrambled into the boat as well as he could with his hands bound behind him, and tumbled forward, followed by Mr Mackenzie. In a trice all were embarked, and the sampan was pushed off, leaving the guard to return to their homes, fully convinced that they had done a service to some important man moving secretly about the town.

'Where is the boatman who owns the sampan?' asked Jack of young Ho.

The Chinaman chuckled. 'He has gone into the town to see what is afoot, I expect,' he replied. 'At any rate, his house was empty, so I brought out the oars. I can pay him when I return.'

'All to the good,' said Jack; 'we got away all the quieter.'

These remarks had passed in Chinese, and by this time the strong, skilful arms of Wong had driven the sampan far out on the dusky surface of the stream.

Now Jim began to laugh, but softly, and it was in soft tones that he called out, 'Say, Mackenzie, are you tired of your bracelet?'

The boat shook with the violent start which the captives could not restrain.

'Jim! Jim!' murmured the agent. 'Are you there? What does it mean?'

'Means you're safe and well, my friend!' replied Jim, scrambling along the sampan and opening his knife. 'I'll cut you loose in a jiffy.'

'And who is the mandarin?' breathed Nyssens. 'Did he not come into the boat?'

'He did all right,' returned Jim. 'But he only took on the job for this special occasion. In private life he's known as Jack Burnet!'

'So it was Jack!' chuckled Mr Mackenzie. 'Jack, after all! I was wondering why an occasional tone had a familiar ring, though the Chinese was Al! No one could have done it better.'

'I'll bet you're right,' remarked Jim. 'I couldn't hang on to it myself, but I could see the effect it was having.'

'Come down to the stern,' called Jack, who had now got rid of his disguise.

Mr Mackenzie scrambled along to the place Jim had left, and seized Jack by the hand.

'Jack,' he said, 'you did that wonderfully.'

The only thing I was hoping for was to be dragged to the Yamen, and so into comparative safety, before some one took the notion of knocking us on the head. And here we are safe and sound, and going down-stream, I suppose, for Wushan.'

'Not straight,' said Jack. 'That's just what I want to talk to you about.'

He related what he had learned of Lew's fate, and he and Mr Mackenzie talked to Wong as the latter pulled, and learned all they could of the place where the fisherman declared that Lew was imprisoned.

'We'll have him out of that all right, I fancy,' said the agent. 'There will only be a small guard set over him, for nobody will dream that we know where he is. How about this man here? Do you think he can really be trusted?'

'I believe he's all right,' said Jack; and told the story of the upset sampan and the saving of Wong's children.

'Ah yes,' murmured Mr Mackenzie; 'that will give ye a great pull over him, saving his son. I'll appeal to his self-interest, another feeling pretty well as strong.'

He dropped into Chinese, and promised Wong the sum of one hundred dollars if he would aid in a successful attempt to get Lew free from his

captors; and the little man swore he would be faithful.

Jack now wished to learn how Mr Mackenzie had fared since he escaped from the *hong*, and the agent told his story. He had made his way towards the river through a network of obscure lanes, and had come upon Nyssens struggling in the hands of a couple of carters, who had discovered that he was a foreigner, and were plundering him. Despite his partially disabled condition, the agent had gone to Nyssens' help; but the men raised an uproar, fetched their neighbours out, and both had been seized.

'On the whole, I got off very luckily,' concluded Mr Mackenzie, 'for I managed to save my game arm from further ill-usage, and ye know the rest.'

At this moment Jim Wallace came creeping aft.

'What's the next move?' murmured Jim.

'Ay, ay; we must hold a council of war,' said Mr Mackenzie. 'The way this fellow's pulling we'll soon be at the spot. I know the village, but I know naught of the houses in it.'

Two minutes' talk settled the general line of attack. The assailing party would be three in number—Jack, Jim, and Wong. Mr Mackenzie was disabled by reason of his wound; Nyssens was no good at such work; and Jack ruled Ho's son out for two reasons—first, he was not sure

of him in a rough-and-tumble fight, and, second, he did not want to get the man into trouble in the neighbourhood where he lived.

'Are we going into this cheerful scrap with nothing but our bare fists?' asked Jim. 'I guess Lew's guard will have something handy, even if it's no more than a three-pronged spear such as some of them carry. Nyssens, where's your pistol?'

'Those men took it from me,' growled the Belgian.

'And we left our guns behind, for we'd burned every cartridge,' went on Jim, 'and there isn't so much as a stick handy.'

'Oh, we can get hold of a stick all right,' said Jack. 'Wong can put us on a bamboo grove, I expect, when we land, and we'll cut a jolly good cudgel apiece; and Wong has his spear.'

'Say, we'll put him in front to poke holes through them, and then follow up and club 'em like a New York bobby,' chuckled Jim. 'I hope they won't be able to shoot.'

'No fear of that,' said Mr Mackenzie; 'there won't be a firearm among them, and if there were, they wouldn't know how to use it.'

'That's O.K.,' returned Jim. 'If it comes to a stick-and-fist scrap, we'll p'r'aps be able to put up a tidy show.'

'There's the place,' said Mr Mackenzie; and they all looked ahead.

They saw one or two dim lights burning low down at the water's edge some distance in front, and Wong now turned the nose of the sampan towards the shore. Two hundred yards short of the faint gleams, the skiff was run up to the bank and made fast to a small tree.

'Plenty of bamboos about here,' said Wong, who had been informed of the need for weapons; and he borrowed Jack's knife and went ashore and disappeared into the darkness. In a short time he came back with a couple of heavy rattans.

'Too long,' said Jim, running his hands over them. 'In a rough-and-tumble you don't want a long club; you want to get close up and hit hard. Look at the bobby's truncheon and the burglar's jemmy; both short and handy. I'll trim these down.'

He went to work with his knife, and shaped the two sticks to his fancy; then handed one to Jack.

'Hist!' said Mr Mackenzie suddenly. 'What's that?'

All listened. They heard, faint and far away across the paddy fields, the confused uproar of a Chinese rabble, softened by distance to a mere murmur.

'They're a good way off yet,' said Jack; 'but we've got to hurry.'

'I'll bet it's a crew coming back to this very place with their loot,' said Jim in a quick, low voice.

'Nothing more likely,' returned Jack. 'Come on!'

A few last words of direction and agreement were exchanged; then the three hurried along the bank on their desperate venture—to attack the house where they believed that Lew was hidden and guarded by pirates.

'Say, if Lew's there we must rush 'em straight,' muttered Jim.

'Rather,' returned Jack; 'there isn't an instant to lose.'

It was a matter of seconds to gain the village street, and Wong led the way to a house rather larger than the rest, standing within its own mud walls. He marched up to the door and rapped on it with the butt of his spear. As he did so, he slipped on his mask, which he had carried under his loose, blue cotton shirt. Jack and Jim crouched in the shadow, out of sight of any one who should open the door.

They heard footsteps moving inside, then a voice demanded who was there.

In reply Wong uttered a single word; it was the password of the band.

That was enough. One by one the bars were removed, and the door was opened a little. A flood of yellow light streamed upon the figure of the fisherman. It came from a lamp held in the hand of the man who had come to the door. The light showed the form of the fisherman, his masked face, his shining spear, and his fellow-pirate gave him greeting as one of the band.

Wong now put a question. It had been carefully framed, so that the answer might show whether they were on a false quest or no. Madness would it have been to assail an empty place, and risk a desperate conflict, to learn that the prison was empty, the captive carried away.

'Is everything ready to take the white boy to the place Ah Foo has appointed?' asked the fisherman.

'All is ready,' replied the guard; 'he is well secured, and can be taken as silently as a bird flies through the air.'

A single word was enough between Jack and his companion.

'Yes,' breathed the patrol-leader into Jim's ear, and they leapt forward, Jim hurling himself with all his weight and strength against the door.

It swung back, and Jim rocketed straight into the guard, sending him headlong, until he tripped over a bench and brought up with a crash on the floor, his head thudding against a heavy



chest which stood beside the wall, and the lamp flying from his hand.

They were now in a good-sized room, lighted by a second lamp upon the table, round which three men were seated playing at some game. These were the remaining guards, and they bounded to their feet and rushed to seize their weapons as the assailants burst upon them. One, a big, stout fellow, but nimble as a cat, made a jump for a very ugly-looking tool, a trident fixed on a stout staff. He caught it up, whirled round, and came charging down the room like a bull, the well-whetted points of his terrible weapon laid straight for Jim, who had just felled a second man with his heavy rattan. Jack was on the other side of the table.

'Look out, Jim!' roared the patrol-leader, and raced round to intercept the Chinaman. He was too late; the man was past and launching his blow. Without the warning shout, Jim would have received the points deep in his body. He glanced round and sprang aside.

At the same moment, Jack hurled his stick at the pirate with all his might. The club caught the fellow in the back of his neck, and spoiled the second thrust he was launching at Jim.

Jack followed at full speed, recovered his stick, and fetched the wielder of the trident a heavy crack across the skull. The man reeled, and Jim

seized upon the three-pronged spear and tore it from his hands. The Chinaman gave up the unequal contest, leapt for the door, and fled out into the night.

They heard a name cried, and looked round. The fisherman had assailed the fourth man, and the pair were locked in close battle in the farthest corner of the room. In the struggle the fisherman's mask had been knocked off, and the man was crying, 'Wong! Wong!' in a tone of the greatest amazement and fury,

He was a much bigger man than the fisherman, and with a tremendous effort he tore himself free of Wong's clutch, darted through a door in the corner behind him, pulled it to swiftly, and shot a bolt on the other side.

'Our fight!' sang out Jim. 'Anybody hurt?'

No; there was scarcely so much as a bruise among the three of them. The surprise had been complete, and had given them an easy victory.

'Where's Lew?' cried Jack, and rushed at the bolted door, and hurled himself against it.

'He's in there, sure enough,' said Jim, 'for there's no sign of him here. Stand aside, Jack.'

Jim seized a heavy stool in his powerful grasp, and assailed the door with tremendous blows. At the fifth blow he burst it open. Jack pushed

it back and ran through the doorway. All was dark and silent within. Jim made a couple of strides to the table, seized the lamp which still burned there, and followed the patrol-leader. The light showed a large, bare room, empty, and open to the eye from corner to corner.

'Nothing in the place but an old crate,' said Jim, pointing to a bamboo crate standing against one wall, with a couple of sheaves of millet straw carelessly tossed on it.

'No sign of Lew here!' snapped Jack. 'That next door, Jim!'

They opened it, and saw that it led into a little courtyard. It was the route by which the fourth man had escaped. Out they went, and found a stable, a granary, and a couple of small outhouses. A swift search of these yielded no result. The missing Scout seemed to have utterly vanished out of the place.

'Let's get hold of one of them and make him say where Lew is,' cried Jack. 'He may be hidden in a secret place.'

They ran back to the main room, and Jack called the name of their missing comrade as they went. There was no answer.

At the door leading to the street they found Wong on guard with his spear. They had left two of the pirates stretched on the floor; there was no sign of them now.

'I thought those chaps were stunned!' cried Jim Wallace.

'Stunned or shamming,' returned Jack; 'they have cleared out now, anyhow.'

He spoke to Wong in Chinese, and the fisherman said that the pirates had fled as soon as they found themselves unobserved. He was now keeping watch lest they should return in force with friends at their back.

Jack asked Wong if he knew of any secret hiding-place about the house; but the fisherman shook his head. If there was such a place he knew nothing of it.

Back went the two comrades in search of their lost friend. They called his name; they tapped here and there on the walls to see if a hollow sound would betray some hidden spot. But they heard nothing; found nothing.

'He must be somewhere here,' groaned Jack. 'They've had no chance to shift him; we were on them too quick, and got them on the jump right away.'

'Ay, but where?' growled Jim.

For a moment there was silence as they looked wildly round. They were standing in the room to which entrance was gained by the door Jim had burst open. Into this silence there came a faint scratching and shuffling.

'What's that?' snapped Jack.

'Rats in the millet sheaves there,' replied Jim.

Jack made three quick steps to the spot and tossed a sheaf aside. A wild cry burst from his lips. 'Here he is! Here's Lew!'

Yes; there was the missing Scout, bound and gagged, and lashed inside the crate—lashed so tightly that though he heard every word and movement of his friends he could do no more than cause a faint rustling sound to guide them to his tiny prison.

'Merciful powers!' shouted Jim; 'they've crammed Lew into one of those cages where they shut up the worst kind of prisoners to keep them safe!'

For one second they peered through the bars at Lew's white face and beseeching eyes, then fell to work with their knives to rip the cage open and fetch him out.

They wasted no time in searching for the fastenings of the lid of the cage. These are so cunningly contrived and twisted into the framework that none can be sure where they lie save the maker of the contrivance, and both knew it, and hacked fiercely at the strips of bamboo which imprisoned Lew Standing. They hacked in vain; the tough strips of bamboo, carefully chosen and seasoned, hard as steel, smooth as glass, defied their frenzied efforts.

'An axe! an axe!' cried Jim. 'Nothing else will do it; the knives are useless!'

'Give me the lamp,' said Jack. 'I'll find something. 'Cheer up, Lew, old boy, we'll soon have you out.'

The lamp was barely in his hand when in ran Wong.

'Those people we heard shouting have come,' he said quickly. 'They are marching down the village street; they will be here in a moment.' He spoke, of course, in Chinese.

'What is it, Jack?' cried Jim.

'The enemy in force,' replied Jack. 'There's only one thing to be done; up with the cage and off to the boat with the whole thing!'

'Ay, ay,' said Jim. 'Once aboard the boat and we'll be all right yet.'

'Look!' cried Jack, 'here are the poles by which the cage is carried. What luck to find them handy!'

He caught up the poles from a corner where they lay, and ran them through the top of the cage.

'I will go first; I know the way!' cried Wong; and he sprang to place his shoulders under the poles. Jim took the hinder ends, and the cage was swung up instantly.

'Put out the lamp,' said Wong to Jack; and the latter dashed it to the earthen floor.

Wong at once trotted out of the back-door into the courtyard, and Jim followed. From the courtyard a door led into a lane behind the house, and the by-road was reached in safety. As they gained the open air, they heard the yells of the mob surging up to the front of the house.

'Tell him to go full pelt,' breathed Jim; and Jack passed the word to Wong, and the cage was borne forward with great speed.

Suddenly a red glare of light shone across their path directly in front. It came from a narrow passage which cut into their road at right angles. Some of the mob, bearing torches, were rushing round to the back of the house.

Round plunged Wong; to go on would have carried them into the arms of their enemies, so the bearers retraced their steps for a score of yards. Then the fisherman swung at right angles into a dark, narrow gullet of a way, running between high walls. This was another way out of the village, but a bad and broken path, over which the bearers stumbled slowly. But they gained its protecting darkness before the torch-bearers had flashed the red light of their flambeaux upon them and their helpless load, and Jack, bringing up the rear, breathed freely.

Suddenly their progress was interrupted. A man, racing along the narrow way to join his

friends and neighbours, rushed at them in the darkness, and cannoned full into Wong. He had the worst of the encounter, for he charged upon the end of a pole, and went down with a yell of pain.

'On, on!' cried Jack fiercely in Chinese.

There was no need to urge Wong. The little man drove swiftly forward over the prostrate Chinaman, who was trampled underfoot, and was left yelling madly in the muddy way.

But his outcries had been heard. There was a flash of torches down the narrow way. Jack turned and saw that five or six runners were in full pursuit. He knew the leader. The man bore a torch, and its light fell on his face; it was the big fellow who had been armed with the trident.

'They are after us!' cried Jack. 'Hurry! hurry!'

Alas! at that moment their flight was cut short. Jim, who was at the hinder end of the poles, caught his foot against a projecting stone, and went down headlong, the cage pitching to the ground.

Jack glanced back. The big fellow was running with tremendous speed, and closing fast upon their rear. The patrol-leader was carrying Wong's spear.

'I'll hold 'em a bit!' he cried; 'you push

ahead;' and he turned, threw the spear forward, and prepared to hold the narrow gully.

At six yards distance the torch-bearer perceived the shining head of the spear laid full for his breast. He pulled himself up in his stride, but was urged forward by those pushing in the rear. Jack leapt out and struck at the arm holding the torch. The keen, narrow blade went through the man's forearm as if it had been driven through a sheet of paper. The torch fell to the ground, and the Chinaman swerved aside with a howl of agony.

But as Jack tugged to get his spear-point free, a second man sprung forward, a heavy cudgel swinging above his head. Jack saw the impending danger, dropped his spear-haft and sprang back. He was too late. Before he could get clear of the sweep of the club, down it came, crushing his hat, and landing on his head a blow under which he reeled to the ground, stunned and senseless.



The torch bearer perceived the stinging heat of the spear had full
for his object

CHAPTER XXII.

THE VICEROY'S CAMP.

WHEN Jack Burnet came to himself again, he wondered, first, why his head ached so dreadfully, and, second, where he was. He was staring up into a sky full of stars, and he could hear the steady swing and splash of a pair of sweeps. He half-raised himself, and found that he had been lying in the stern of the sampan, and that the light skiff was travelling at a great pace along the dusky surface of the river. Water was running down his neck, and he felt that the planks around him were wet.

'That's good,' said a quiet voice beside him; 'ye're coming round again. It was a gey bad knock; but ye're built of too good stuff, Jack, to be easily settled by yon thievish loons.'

'I'm wet,' muttered Jack.

'Ay, I threw water on ye,' was the reply.

Then recollection flashed back upon Jack's mind. 'Where's Lew?' he cried quickly. 'Is he in the sampan with us? Where's Lew?'

There was silence for a moment; then Mr Mackenzie replied in a grave tone, 'No, Jack, he is not here.'

'Why not?' cried Jack; 'there was only a little way to carry him.'

'It was all too far under the circumstances,' replied the agent. 'Jim was tripped up and flung down. He managed to scramble to his feet, and got hold of you. How he got out of the crowd with you, he can't explain; but somehow he did it. It was just a wild whirl of blows and stabs; but he got free, and ran for the boat. Jim says Wong got a pole loose and fought like a little tiger, and kept them back a bit. At any rate, the two of them came tumbling down the bank, with you across Jim's shoulder. Ye may be sure we lost no time getting into the stream, and they didn't follow us. I expect they feared we'd have firearms.'

A voice came from the bow. 'I'm sorry to my heart, Jack, that Lew was left behind,' said Jim; 'but it couldn't be helped. If we'd stayed any longer the whole crowd would have been on hand, and we'd have been chopped up in no time.'

'I know that, Jim,' replied Jack, 'and I can see that I owe my life to you'——

'Pooh!' said Jim; 'not a word about that. Couldn't leave everybody behind, you know. How's your head feeling?'

'Oh, it aches a bit; but that doesn't matter,' lied Jack.

'I should think it does ache a bit,' said Jim. 'You had a tremendous rattle over the nut that time. I heard it, and thought it was a bang hard enough to settle a nigger.'

'My hat broke it more than a trifle,' said Jack. 'But what are we going to do about Lew?'

'We must push on down to Wushan,' said Mr Mackenzie, 'and let the lad's father know how things stand. Then the mandarins must be tackled. We've taken a long step forward in finding out what's become of him, ye see. Ay, we'll soon get hold of him again.'

Jack sat in downcast silence, his heart full of a deep bitterness. They had failed, and Mr Mackenzie's attempt to cheer him up was of little use. Jack could not get his Brother Scout's face out of his mind—that white, drawn face, agonised by the torture of the gag, of bonds, of cruel imprisonment in the narrow limits of a captive's cage.

The sampan swept round a bend, and a fresh sweep of the river was then opened up to view.

'What's yon?' snapped Mr Mackenzie. 'There's neither town, village, nor even hamlet there.'

Three or four hundred yards below, the bank was dotted with twinkling lights, and the scent of wood fires came down to them on the evening breeze.

The rowers rested on their sweeps, and the boat glided on; while all stared at the lights, which betokened many people and much activity at a spot where they knew no house stood.

Suddenly they were challenged, and a boat darted from the shade of the bank, and swept up to them. At the next instant a second boat came from midstream, and lay on the other side.

'We are attacked by pirates!' cried Nyssens, his voice shaking with terror.

'Nay, nay, not this time,' said Mr Mackenzie; and replied to the challenge.

It had been given in Chinese, and was couched in the words, 'Whence come you?'

'From Ho-Chow,' replied Mr Mackenzie.

'Who are you, and what is your business?'

'We are foreign merchants, flying to save our lives from the mob of Ho-Chow.'

'They have risen?'

'They have, and have plundered our *hongs*.'

A kindled lamp was taken from a locker, and its light was cast upon the sampan. The occupants of the latter looked eagerly to see who had intercepted them. They saw a large row-boat filled with soldiers, and the officer who was speaking with the agent stood in the stern.

The officer looked at them attentively for a few moments; then said, 'You must go at once before General Liu.'

All who understood his words started in amazement. General Liu, the governor of the province, was present in person! This, then, was the meaning of the maze of lights, the activity along the shore, and the guard on the stream. The powerful viceroy was on the spot, with his army of attendants, officials, and troops.

The officer directed them to pull to the camp. Wong and Ho's son, who were at the sweeps, obeyed at once, and the guardboat followed closely at the rear.

'Say, Mackenzie, what's this little game?' asked Jim, who had grasped nothing of what had passed.

'Why Jim, General Liu himself, the viceroy of the province, is camped down there. I'll be bound he's come to look into this business for himself. Ye see, this mandarin P'eng that was killed by the pirates was a well-known man at the Emperor's court, and Liu has got to do something, or things may be awkward for him; so he's made a secret pounce on the neighbourhood, to get at the truth if possible. My word, I wouldn't be in the shoes of the mandarin Yang, the governor of Ho-Chow, for a trifle. Liu is hard to rouse, I'm told, but a fierce hitter when he shuts his fist.'

'The harder he hits old Yang the better,' said Jim.

At this moment the sampan ran alongside the bank, and the officer in the guardboat handed the whole party over to a patrol which was passing at the time. By these men they were led to a tent which had been pitched in the midst of the camp, and taken at once into the presence of the powerful governor.

The great man was seated on a pile of cushions, arranged to form a sort of divan, and his gorgeous robes and the button in his cap betokened that he belonged to the first rank of the great officials of the Chinese empire. Before him knelt, in an attitude of the humblest respect, a row of local dignitaries, whom he was questioning most closely and severely.

He glanced up as the party was marched in under guard of the patrol, and raised his eyebrows in surprise to see Mr Mackenzie, whom he knew.

They exchanged a few words, and then Mr Mackenzie plunged into a full account of the events of the day.

General Liu listened with deep attention, and interrupted the speaker with neither question nor comment.

'Strange order is kept in this neighbourhood,' he remarked when the agent had finished his story; 'but I will teach these turbulent people a lesson before I return to my capital. How far

am I now camped from this village of which you speak ?'

'About four miles,' replied Mr Mackenzie promptly.

'And is it on my road to Ho-Chow ?'

'Yes.'

General Liu turned to an officer at his elbow, and gave a few orders to him in a low voice. The officer kotowed, and went out of the tent.

'Ask your companions if they could recognise the men who were on guard over the white boy ?' said General Liu to Mr Mackenzie.

'I should know them again at once,' burst out Jack.

'Ah, you speak Chinese ?' said the viceroy, his yellow face lighting up with pleasure.

'Yes, your excellency,' replied Jack.

'Then you shall come with me and be my guide about the place after it has been reduced to order,' said the viceroy.

Then he turned and murmured fresh orders to a second officer.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE VICEROY AND THE PIRATE.

THE next morning, two hours before the dawn, a force of two hundred soldiers set out from the camp. They moved as silently as ghosts, for the strictest orders had been given that the march was to be made without sound, and only the faintly muttered commands of the officers could be heard as the line was put in motion.

In the midst of the detachment two sedan-chairs were borne along by coolies. The first was the splendid carved and gilded chair of the viceroy, carried by eight men, and occupied by General Liu; and Jack, borne by four men, rode in the second. One of Jack's bearers was Wong, for the little man had attached himself closely to the patrol-leader, and had begged to be taken into his service. The truth was that the fisherman's head sat very uneasily on his shoulders; he was filled with dread lest at any moment he might be denounced as an associate of the pirates by some of the local people summoned to the viceroy's camp, and in that case his neck and the executioner's sword would speedily become acquainted.

Jack was feeling more himself again. He had

had several hours' sleep and a capital breakfast, and was in high feather at the thought of approaching the village in this powerful company, in the retinue of the man whose authority was absolute and unquestioned from corner to corner of the province.

On and on marched the troops, silently and swiftly, and at that dark hour which precedes the dawn, the detachment halted outside the sleeping village. The chairs were set down, and Jack sprang out from his, and went forward to join the cluster of officers gathered round General Liu.

He heard the viceroy's orders. They were short and stern. The village was to be surrounded, and not a living creature allowed to pass the cordon. If any man permitted a villager to escape, his own head should pay forfeit.

With noiseless tread, each officer departed to gather his troop, and post it at the point assigned to him. Every one was alert and eager to obey, for all knew that Liu was no person to be trifled with, and that the smallest slip would cost the blunderer his head.

The village was small and compact, and within ten minutes all movements had ceased. The troops were at their posts, an encircling line, and the whole command awaited in breathless silence the lifting of the curtain of night.

Dawn broke, and the village was roused by the beating of drums. In a trice out swarmed the

people to see what the sound meant. At sight of the troops, they darted back into their houses like rabbits into their burrows. Conscience made cowards of them all.

General Liu sent in an officer with a detachment to fetch the village elders before him. The head-men came out, seven in number, trembling and livid with terror. They thrust an old man forward as spokesman.

'So this is the order you keep,' said the governor in a harsh, deep voice. 'A nest of pirates and kidnappers I find here!'

'Nay, excellency—nay, it is not so!' cried the old man desperately. 'All the evil lies at the door of two bad characters—the brothers Yen. In their house they harbour strangers. On them let your anger fall.'

'Ay!' cried another head-man; 'there be five strangers there now. It is they who have given our village an evil name.'

General Liu pointed to the second speaker.

'Take that man,' he said to an officer. 'Let him point out to you the strangers, and bring them hither.'

'Excellency,' cried Jack, 'it was in the house of Yen that my friend was shut up!'

'Go with the detachment,' said Liu, 'and see if he is there now.'

Jack sprang away gladly on this quest, and at

that instant an uproar arose on the other side of the village. Officers shouted orders, the soldiers yelled, and a hue-and-cry seemed to be in progress; but Jack could not see what was going on, for the scene of disorder was behind the most distant houses.

Down the village street marched the detachment, and Jack was once more at the door which he and Jim had rushed the previous night. In they went. The house was empty!

'Ah!' said the officer, 'the noise we heard was caused by an attempt to escape; the strangers have fled.'

'They would never take Lew with them,' thought Jack, and he leapt from room to room in eager search of his friend. No sign of the prisoner in the house; no sign in the granary; no sign in the stable! Then Jack burst into a small outhouse, and gave a cry of joy as he caught sight of the cage in the far corner, again with straw tossed upon it. But the cry of joy was checked as he tore away the straw and saw that the cage was empty. Here was the prison, but where was the prisoner?

A shadow fell across the doorway. Jack looked up, and saw that a man was glancing in at him. It was not a soldier; it was a priest, a Buddhist priest, in yellow robe, with shaven head—a tall, thin man with piercing dark eyes.

Scarcely had Jack caught a glimpse of him than the priest vanished, and when Jack gained the door of the outhouse, he was going through the gate of the courtyard into the by-way behind the house.

At this moment the Chinese officer came out of the house.

'What is that priest doing here?' asked Jack.

'I have seen no priest,' replied the officer; 'and it is clear that there is no prisoner in this house. Let us return to the place of assembly; the troops are drawing in and driving the people thither.'

They returned to the main street, and Jack saw that the cordon was closing in around the spot where the general stood, and that the inhabitants were being packed in a mass before him.

'If they have caught some of the pirates,' thought Jack, 'we shall soon discover where Lew is;' and he hastened to regain the open space where he had left General Liu.

During the wait before the dawn, a small tent had been pitched, and before this the governor and his chief officers were standing in a group. A guard of soldiers kept a clear space around them, and Jack upon attempting to gain the side of the general was at once checked.

'No one may enter the open space on any

account,' said the officer of the guard, coming up to him. 'You must wait till the viceroy has finished with those evil-doers.'

The officer nodded towards the other side of the open space, and Jack glanced across. The first man who caught his eye was Ah Foo; there was no mistaking that gigantic figure, and Jack knew him by a dozen signs, though the pirate captain's head was hung so low upon his breast that his face could not be seen.

Jack drew a breath of immense relief.

'They've caught him! they've caught him!' said the Scout to himself. 'Now it will be easy to discover where he has hidden Lew.'

Beside the pirate captain stood two of his comrades, each with bound hands and a soldier guarding him. In front of them lay three figures huddled on the ground. Jack caught the thin voice of the old head-man, still under examination by the viceroy.

'It is the truth I am telling your excellency. Yonder six men are the evil-doers whom you seek. They are the five strangers and Yen who sheltered them.'

'Bring Yen before me,' demanded the governor.

'He is dead, excellency; he is the short, stout man lying yonder, the last brought in of the men slain by your soldiers as they were trying to escape.'

'They have saved the headsman three strokes,' said Liu grimly.

The governor now looked fixedly at the row of kneeling elders as if pondering upon their punishment. The wretched men crouched before him in the utmost terror, for he might order them to be put to tortures where death would come as an unspeakable relief. But Liu was a soldier, and his methods were stern and terribly direct. He turned to his secretary.

'Take seven slips of paper,' he said, 'and mark them with seven characters.'

This was done. The governor took one of the slips, and marked it afresh.

'Let these men draw lots,' he said, 'and he who draws the paper I have marked, place him with the men who tried to escape.'

The lot fell upon the third man in the row of trembling Chinese. The man was at once seized, bound, and hurried to the spot where the pirates stood. A thrill ran through the crowd of watching villagers, and General Liu marked it.

'This will teach ye who ought to lead the people to do your duty,' he said sternly. 'Let their heads fall at once,' and he pointed to the four men.

Ten yards away stood the headsman, a tall, brawny fellow, his broad glittering blade

laid over his arm, and his assistants at his side.

The prisoners were at once dragged before him, and this movement caused Jack to cry out. He could not restrain himself. He knew that within a matter of seconds these men would cease to live, and they would take with them the knowledge of Lew's fate.

'Excellency! excellency!' cried Jack; 'let me speak with you before the sword falls.'

But this appeal was lost in another which broke out almost at the same moment. The latter came from Ah Foo. The pirate captain had been at the end of the line of doomed men. He did not resist the clutch of the soldiers, who dragged him past the spot where the governor was standing; but he moved so slowly that there was a wide gap between him and the other three.

As he passed General Liu, he suddenly exerted all his gigantic strength and brought his guards up standing. For the first time he threw up his head and looked the governor full in the face.

'I am an innocent man!' he cried. 'Will your excellency slay a man who has done no wrong?'

A mocking smile ran over the faces of the officers standing behind the governor. What kind

of innocent man was this, who led a desperate assault on the cordon of troops, and had only been secured after a fierce struggle?

But Jack, gazing eagerly upon General Liu's face, saw a marvellous thing. The general had been watching the file of condemned men with a look of grim satisfaction. At the first tones of the full, strong voice which addressed him, he gave a violent start, and turned his eyes upon the last prisoner.

Face to face they stood, the great and powerful official and the condemned pirate.

They knew each other.

Jack was certain of that at once. But, to his utter astonishment, it was the man of absolute power who was aghast with horror at this meeting. The viceroy's yellow face became ashen, his mouth fell open, his hands shook as they rested on the hilt of his great curved sabre.

The soldiers flung themselves on the huge figure, and again strove to drag Ah Foo forward; but a gesture from General Liu checked them. At the next moment he spoke. A start of surprise went through his band of officers, for they could not see their master's face.

'Remove his bonds!' said the governor in a low, unsteady voice.

The order was obeyed instantly, and Ah Foo's hands were free. He folded them in the ample

sleeves of his decent blue gown and bowed submissively. Then he raised himself, and once more looked the governor in the face, not insolently, not appealingly, but calmly and confidently.

'Who are you, and whence come you?' demanded General Liu. He had gained control of himself once more, and was in appearance the harsh, inflexible ruler.

'I am a merchant, your excellency, and I have come into this country to buy goods. My name is Yao Tsun.'

Again a mocking smile ran round the circle of officers; but it vanished as the governor turned to his secretary.

'I will speak with him in my tent,' said General Liu, 'and I wish you to be present.'

A profound silence fell upon all when it was seen that the prisoner was being led to the tent, with the secretary following the two soldiers who guarded the pretended merchant; but at the next moment all eyes were turned upon the headsman, about to commence his deadly work.

Jack had watched this scene between the governor and Ah Foo with almost 'a stupefaction of wonder. It was Ah Foo; yes, most certainly it was the man who had fetched and carried baskets of linen from their house—a big, meek, silent fellow as he had seemed, and then had proved to be a desperate and bloodthirsty pirate.

Yet this had seemed still another man—a quiet, dignified, lofty figure, playing superbly the part of a stranger who had been wrongly accused.

‘It is Ah Foo,’ said Jack to himself. ‘Who should know him if I don’t? I must speak to the governor and warn him; he is being deceived.’

He approached the officer of the guard, and begged him to take a message to the governor. The officer refused.

‘When General Liu retires like that he wishes to be private,’ replied the Chinaman. ‘It would not be well for the man who should disturb him. You must wait till he comes out.’

Five minutes passed, each minute seeming like an hour to Jack’s burning impatience, when a man stepped from the tent, alone, and quietly walked away. Every face was filled with astonishment. It was the condemned prisoner.

He moved slowly and composedly along, and advanced towards the spot where Jack and the officer of the guard were standing. The latter stepped forward to intercept him. Ah Foo calmly held out a strip of silk, upon which several characters were inscribed. Jack read them over the officer’s shoulder. They ran: ‘*Give protection and honour to Yao Tsun,*’ and were signed and sealed by the governor himself. Within the jurisdiction of General Liu, it was a perfect safe-conduct.

The officer read, kotowed, and 'drew back. Ah Foo walked on, and now all gave him passage and eyed him with wondering respect, since it was plain that he was under the personal protection of the great mandarin.

Jack was left in a state of utter confusion. He had counted on gaining knowledge of his friend's prison from the captured pirates, and here was Ah Foo going away in safety. What of the others? He looked up and saw the headsman returning to his place behind the group of officers, wiping his smoking blade. No hope of speech with them. Again Jack urged the officer of the guard to let him approach the governor.

'I will ask the secretary,' said the officer; and went across and spoke to the official, who had just come from the tent and was talking to the staff gathered in front of it.

The officer returned.

'You cannot speak with the general,' he said. 'The strictest orders have been given that no one is to approach him.'

Jack was in despair. He gathered his wits, and began to turn over the situation; it was plain that something very strange had happened, and that the meeting with Ah Foo had driven all thought of Lew out of the viceroy's mind. As for gaining access to the latter against his wish, Jack knew how impossible that was. The

general's men feared him too much to let that happen.

The crowd of villagers was dispersing silently, terrified at the scene they had witnessed, when a scuffling arose on the outskirts of the throng, and four or five of them dragged a man forward. The prisoner was Wong. Jack hurried at once to the spot. As he gained it, an officer approached.

'What does this mean?' demanded the Chinaman.

'It is a pirate,' cried two or three voices. 'We have seen this man with Yen. He is an evil-doer. We wish to deliver him to his excellency.'

Wong said nothing, only looked with wild, appealing eyes on Jack. The fisherman knew he was in a tight corner. If examination were made he would certainly be convicted.

'Let him be bound and handed over to the guard,' said the officer to a couple of soldiers who had attended him.

The soldiers sprang upon Wong, and were about to secure him when Jack struck in promptly.

•'Stay, stay!' cried Jack. 'This man is my servant.'

'He is your servant?' cried the officer in surprise. He and Jack were already acquainted.

It was the man who had commanded the detachment which had been sent to search the house.

‘Certainly,’ said Jack; ‘he came here this morning in the governor’s train. He was one of the four men who carried my chair.’

The thing had been very nearly a tragedy; it turned out a pure comedy. No sooner did the villagers hear that their prisoner had come in the governor’s train than they loosed him with one accord and turned to flee. Pirate or no pirate, they were not going to meddle with a man who had friends at court. The officer began to abuse them for meddlesome busybodies, and would have ordered them a sound flogging apiece had not a bugle rung out a sudden summons. They looked round, and saw that the viceroy’s chair was already at the door of his tent. The general came out and entered; the chair was swung up at once, and the eight bearers took the road back to the camp.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JACK GOES ON SCOUT.

ALL was instant bustle and confusion. The troops hastened to form their ranks for the return march, and at the next instant Jack and Wong were left standing alone. Wong uttered a few words of breathless thanks. It had been a narrow shave for him, and only Jack's interposition had kept his head on his shoulders.

Jack nodded, but said nothing. He was deep in thought. Then he turned, signed to Wong to follow, and walked away in the rear of the retiring troops.

The path back to the camp ran through a bamboo grove, and at once, upon entering the grove, all sight of the village and the scene of the execution was lost. Ten steps after entering the grove Jack sprang aside, and was at once hidden from the troops in front by the trees. Wong followed.

They went thirty yards, and then Jack sat down on a fallen trunk; Wong stood beside him.

'You are not going back to the camp, master?' said Wong.

'No,' said Jack; 'I'm going to stop here till I find out something about Lew Standing.'

'It is certain that he is somewhere about the village,' murmured Wong.

'Bound to be,' replied Jack, 'and his prison could have been easily discovered from the fellows they took. But that's no good now. Then there was Ah Foo'——

'Master! master!' cried Wong in a low, earnest voice; 'what did I tell you about Ah Foo? Do you believe now that he is a strange and terrible man? Did you not see the great governor tremble before him?'

Jack nodded. 'You were right enough, Wong,' said he; 'Ah Foo is a frightful puzzle. He isn't Ah Foo, of course, nor Yao Tsun, or whatever he may call himself at present. But I don't care much who or what he is, if I can only get old Lew out of his claws.'

Jack sat in silence for a few moments, staring on the ground. Then he looked up. 'Wong,' he said, 'I must have some Chinese clothes.'

'Yes, yes,' said the fisherman; 'no use to go about in white man's clothes. Too much talk, too much bobbery.'

'Where can I get some?' asked Jack.

'They are here,' said Wong; and he stroked his garb of threadbare blue cotton.

'Yes; yours would do all right,' returned Jack. 'But what would you do?'

'I can choose among seven suits,' chuckled Wong; and shuffled off towards the execution ground.

Jack followed, and watched the fisherman from the edge of the grove, taking care to keep himself hidden. All was quiet at the spot which had witnessed the governor's vengeance; the terror-stricken villagers had not yet ventured back to the place, and Wong soon secured what he required.

They retired again to the depths of the grove, and Jack put on Wong's clothes and hid his own in a hollow tree. Wong had attired himself in the garments stripped from the dead man, and looked Jack over critically.

'You look very well,' he said, 'but do not let a Chinaman come too close to you.'

The statement and the warning were both to the point. The little man's clothes fitted Jack capitally; but the shape of the face and the colour of the skin would betray him at close quarters.

'What are we to do, master?' asked Wong.

'Watch the village,' replied Jack. 'We want to know where Ah Foo goes, and what he does.'

'They started at once to work clean to the

other side of the place, and this they did by creeping under cover of growing crops till they cut into the road which ran to Ho-Chow.

Here Jack planted himself on a small knoll covered with tea-bushes. From his shelter he could command this side of the village perfectly, and he felt pretty sure that no one would be likely to strike away from the other side in the rear of the troops.

Jack spent a full hour on this knoll, his eyes fixed on the village, his mind working in deep thought. What did this mean, this kidnapping of Lew? Was Ah Foo seizing the corporal of the Eagles for his own purposes? Was he an emissary of the Brethren? Or was the origin of the attack on his Brother Scout to be searched for elsewhere?

Jack looked carefully round each idea, and dismissed the first and second question. He could not help coming back again and again to the men who had fallen upon them in the cornfield beyond Mr Martyn's house and seized upon Lew. Into his mind came the words, 'The one who follows! The one who follows!' That made it certain that those men were not eager to seize any white boy, but that particular one, Lew, who was following Jack. Then the fellow whom he had trundled into the brook proved to be one-handed, and his mind at once flew to

the one-handed runner whom he had seen in the neighbourhood a few hours before. Next he had discovered that the one-handed runner was the channel by which Yang, the mandarin, conveyed his secret orders to Ah Foo, and that the magistrate used the pirate captain and his men as tools with which to carry out villainous plans. Steadily the whole thing worked back to the old rogue who ruled Ho-Chow, and Jack became so certain of his conclusions that he muttered aloud, as if imparting his conviction to a companion, 'Look in Yang's Yamen.'

Suddenly he started. There was a rustling in the bushes, and Wong came gliding up.

'Master,' said the fisherman, 'Ah Foo and a priest are coming along the road. They seem to be going towards Ho-Chow.'

Jack and his follower hid themselves among the tea-bushes and waited. Presently they saw the huge figure of Ah Foo and a man with a shaven head and the robes of a priest walking steadily along the road.

Jack knew the priest again. It was the man who had appeared in the house where Lew had been shut up. Jack wondered if he had anything to do with the business.'

'Who is the priest, Wong?' he murmured.

'It is the priest of the temple of the god of war outside this village,' replied Wong.

The men strode steadily on, and disappeared round a bend of the way.

Jack sprang to his feet. 'Wong,' said he, 'those fellows know where Lew Standing is. We must follow them, and find out where they go and to whom they talk.'

Wong nodded, and the Scout and his follower took up the trail of the pirate and the priest. It was very easy to follow them, for they pressed steadily forward, and at length the north gate of Ho-Chow came into sight. As they approached it, Jack gave Wong his orders.

'Wong,' said he, 'you must follow Ah Foo and the priest, and find out where they go; then bring word to me at Ho's house, where I shall be waiting for you.'

'Yes, master,' said the fisherman, and followed straight after the two men. Jack turned and skirted the city wall, aiming for the west gate, whence Ho's house would be reached easily and quickly by little frequented ways.

It is true that Jack was dressed in poor Chinese garb, and that he had dirtied his feet and legs to take off their whiteness, and pulled low down on his head the huge straw hat he had borrowed from Wong, but for all that he knew that his appearance would not stand close scrutiny. His hair, above all, would give him away, for a Chinese lad with short, close hair

all over his head is absolutely unknown. One and all show a clean-shaven ring with a pigtail springing from the crown; and a pigtail is an impossible thing to acquire in a moment.

But Jack had not gone two hundred yards into the city when he was seized with a brilliant idea. It came to him on his pausing for a moment beside the entrance to a great Buddhist temple, and he glanced into the grounds, studded with splendid old trees and adorned with most beautiful buildings. A group of moving figures caught Jack's eye, and, as no one was near at hand, he came to a full stop and gazed at them, for upon the very instant of seeing them they gave him the cue for a splendid disguise.

The group was composed of six or seven boys, about the same age as himself. Each was prostrating himself at full length, rising, taking a step, and prostrating himself once more. Thus they were making the circuit of the sacred enclosure, measuring the ground with their bodies. Each had a close-shaven head, which shone in the sun as he rose and bent himself to the next prostration, and each wore the robe and scarlet scarf of a lama, a Buddhist monk. They were boy-lamas, of whom there are great numbers in the Buddhist temples and monasteries, and upon the spot Jack saw a disguise of disguises, a dress in which he could be safe anywhere.

'I can't grow a pigtail,' thought Jack, 'but it's easy enough to fetch every bit of hair off, and as a boy-lama I could go anywhere.'

He hurried on and gained young Ho's house, and found the master standing in the open doorway of his courtyard. Young Ho looked carelessly at Jack, thinking he was a common coolie; but when Jack raised the broad hat and looked him full in the face, young Ho started, and made room for Jack to enter the place.

'Why have you come back?' he asked uneasily. 'Do you not know there is great danger for foreigners in Ho-Chow? There are many people here who are deeply in sympathy with the Brethren, and if they knew that you were English they would kill you.'

'I'm going to dress myself so that I shall be quite safe,' replied Jack. 'I intend to wear the robes of a boy-lama; but first I must have my head shaved. Fetch me a barber who is to be trusted.'

'I will do it myself,' replied young Ho. 'I can do it very well; and a barber brought in from the street might chatter too freely.'

He set to work at once, and was in the middle of the operation when Wong arrived with news.

'They went straight to the Yamen of the mandarin Yang,' reported Wong, 'and there they are at this moment.'

‘Just as I thought,’ said Jack. ‘Here, Wong, take this money and buy me a set of robes such as the young lamas wear. You will find plenty of them in the Street of the Clothes-sellers.’

Jack handed over a couple of dollars, and Wong went at once. Jack had taken care to secure what money he had about him in a belt, which was now round his waist next to his skin. Within half-an-hour Wong was back with the dress, and found Ho staining Jack’s head and the parts of his body that would be exposed with the juice of walnuts. Jack put on the dress; and by means of the robes, the stain, and a handful or two of dirt rubbed on, he made himself a capital specimen of a boy-lama. Luckily his eyes and his complexion were dark; and though his eyes had not the almond twist of a Celestial, yet such is the immense variety of types seen in the ranks of wandering lamas, who come from every corner of the East, that no one would give him a second glance. Wong had bought a begging-basin of beaten copper; and armed with this, Jack struck for the neighbourhood of the Yamen, where he felt sure Lew had been carried.

‘Yang’s got him,’ thought Jack, ‘and Yang means to make Mr Standing pay up a big lump of money before Lew gets back to Wushan again.’

Then Yang will call it square with Mr Standing for the money the old rogue was stripped of in Peking, when Mr Standing showed him up for a thievish old scamp.'

Jack gained the Yamen, and strolled all round it, with eyes and ears wide open. All seemed as usual. The rascally horde of runners hung about the entrance and gambled together openly in the outer court, though gambling is a forbidden offence. A row of unlucky prisoners, each loaded with the *cangue*—the huge wooden collar which prevents a man's escape as surely as if he were shut up in a strong cell—sat in the blazing sun, staring about with all the stony impassivity of a Chinaman in trouble, and no one cast a second glance at the figure, familiar enough, of a boy-lama, moving gently along, his eyes apparently on the ground, his begging-basin in his hands.

Jack made the full circuit of the Yamen, then stopped near a man squatting against the boundary wall of the place. 'Stay where you are, Wong,' said Jack in a soft voice, 'and keep a watch. If you see any sign of danger give three calls like a crow;' and Wong nodded.

Jack had made up his mind to a very daring bit of scout-work. He would enter the Yamen, and find out if possible whether his Brother Scout was shut up there or not. To enter the place

was not a matter of great difficulty; to be caught there was another question altogether—above all, if his disguise should be penetrated; so that it behoved him to move with the utmost wariness.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE YAMEN. .

THE Yamen and its many surrounding buildings stood in a great compound, fully ten acres in extent, the whole encircled by a wall nine feet high, which was surmounted by tiles. The enclosure contained courtyards, gardens, and shrubberies; the last-named dotted with rockeries and pavilions.

At the point where Wong was posted a small tree had sprung up at the foot of the wall, and Jack put his foot in a fork and swung himself to the top of the wall. He found himself gazing into a small garden having a pond in the centre and a thick shrubbery all round it. There was not the slightest sign of any living presence, and with a quick movement he slid over the wall and dropped on the turf inside.

He stood for a moment, but the silence remained unbroken. Then, at a sharp scuttle, for he found his unaccustomed robes impeding his movements, he shot into the shrubbery.

It took Jack fully fifteen minutes to draw near the house, so slow and cautious was he compelled to be in his approach. At one time

he had to hide in a clump of fuchsias, for two of the mandarin's secretaries were strolling in the garden. They were young fellows of good family, clad in rich, glowing silks, which shone with brilliant embroidery, and looking as gay as any of the flowers in the lovely garden.

When they had gone, Jack crawled forward, foot by foot, until he was close up to the buildings, where he moved slower still, his eyes on every hand lest some one should come round a corner or through one of the many doorways which pierced the walls at many points.

Suddenly he heard a tapping break out beyond a wall immediately in front of him, and he knew that it was the sound of battledores and shuttlecocks, and he heard voices and bursts of treble laughter. Then a vermilion shuttlecock came flying out over the wall and fell within a couple of yards of the bush behind which he crouched. At the next moment a door in the wall was flung back, and a young woman tottered out on her tiny, crippled feet in search of the lost toy.

She picked it up and went back, leaving the door a little ajar. Jack crawled forward and peeped in. He saw to the one side an open grassy space, where three or four girls were playing with their battledores, and behind this space a narrow alley running straight towards

the back of the house. The alley¹ was bordered by several rows of shrubs, now in full leaf and bloom, splendid azaleas, fuchsias, and camellias. The girls trooped to the far end of the space, and were out of sight. Jack slipped through the door, and went quietly along the alley. He meant to get near to the house and discover as much as he could.

At the end of the alley a great doorway could be seen, leading into a wide hall. Jack went softly up and peered in. The hall was empty. On either side of the place doors opened into inner rooms. He stepped in and glanced from side to side, wondering if it were safe to venture forward, when he heard a chatter of shrill voices behind him. He peered out, and his heart jumped; he was trapped. The girls were coming towards the door; he could not retreat without being seen. To march boldly into the house was impossible; that, too, would mean certain detection. And now a sudden cry arose among the girls, and he wondered if they had caught sight of his head as he looked out. If so, it could be only a few minutes before he found himself brought before Yang, and all his plans would be upset and himself very probably in serious danger.

Within a couple of yards of him a door stood ajar. Jack jumped swiftly to it, his bare feet

falling without a sound on the tiled floor. If the room were empty, he could hide in it for an instant while the girls passed, then step out again to the garden and make at full speed for the wall. He pushed the door a little back and glanced in. It was not empty. A Chinese lady, robed from head to foot in white, sat there. She raised her head as she saw the door open, and for a second she and Jack looked each other straight in the eyes. Then Jack marched right in, and softly closed the door as the girls trooped into the hall.

The Chinese lady may have felt surprised to see a strange boy-lama walk in, but she showed none. She looked calmly at him as if supposing he had come with some message, and Jack bent before her in respectful salute.

'Your servant gives you humble greeting, Pao-Chu,' he said, using the mandarin speech, for this was a great lady who was familiar with the usage of courts.

'Whence do you come and who are you?' asked the lady. It was Pao-Chu, the widow of P'eng, the mandarin who had been slain on his house-boat. Pao-Chu was still a guest in Yang's Yamen, but was expecting to start for her own home shortly.

'I am in danger, as you were in danger, Pao-Chu, on the night when the pirates attacked

your boat,' said Jack; 'and as I helped you then, so I beg you to help me now.'

'*Hi-yah!*' said Pao-Chu softly. 'I know your voice, and now I know your face. You are not a young lama; you are the foreign boy who saved me and my maids from the river-wolves. But what is that?' she asked quickly as a great uproar arose in the hall—voices shouting, women shrieking, the hurrying to and fro of servants.

'I have crept into the house without permission,' said Jack; 'I think I have been seen, and the alarm has been given. They are searching for me, and I do not want to fall into the hands of Yang.'

'He is an evil man,' said Pao-Chu. 'I will help you; go in there.' She pointed to a large cupboard which stood in a corner of the room. Jack was there in two jumps, opened the door, and in a tick was hidden among the robes hung in the great standing-press, and the door drawn to behind him. He had scarcely disappeared when the door was flung open and a woman servant rushed in. But when the new-comer saw Pao-Chu, seated there in silence, and clad in her white robes of deep mourning, she merely gave an exclamation and retired. No one could have entered that room, she thought.

Two minutes later Pao-Chu's own maids came

in, and began an excited account of a suspected thief who was believed to have entered the women's quarters—how Shen, the daughter of the mandarin, had seen a shaven head, a strange man's head, at the door of the hall of the women; and now every one thought that a thief had crept into the house, and a great search was being made.

The women were right about the search. It was pursued with the utmost fury, headed by Yang himself. To the avaricious old mandarin, robbers were the terror of his life, and at the thought of one gaining entrance to his house he was lashed to a frightful rage, and urged the pursuit, venting threats of the most horrible tortures to be inflicted on the miscreant. He himself came into the room where Pao-Chu and her maids were seated, but retired when Pao-Chu told him that she had been there for the last two hours. It was some time before matters became quiet again. Some thought it must have been a false alarm; others declared that the man had gained the public rooms before the alarm had spread, and had so escaped. The latter seemed a very likely solution, for Chinese thieves go to work with the utmost coolness and boldness, and it was not impossible that a stranger had penetrated the most private quarters and then beaten a safe retreat.

When all was quiet again, Pao-Chu ordered one maid to keep the door, and bade them both be silent whatever happened. Then she called to Jack, and the maids' eyes rounded in surprise as the figure of a boy-lama stepped from the great cupboard.

'Now,' said Pao-Chu, 'tell me your story.'

Jack ran over the things which had happened, and told her plainly that he believed Yang had kidnapped his friend, and meant to extort a great ransom from Lew's father, whom Yang hated.

Pao-Chu and her maids listened intently, and nodded from time to time to show that they thoroughly understood the position.

'It is easy to believe that all this is true,' said Pao-Chu, 'for I have reason to know that Yang is an evil man.'

'Ah,' thought Jack, 'you little know how evil. You do not dream that he was the instigator of the pirates who murdered your husband.'

'Yes,' went on Pao-Chu; 'he would seize any one if it would bring money to his treasury. He is the most grasping and covetous of men; I have heard my husband say that many a time.'

'*Hi-yah!*' said the younger maid in a low voice, 'there is a talk among the women of

some one who is shut up in the Red Pavilion beyond the women's garden.'

Jack started. 'Has any one seen the prisoner?' he demanded eagerly.

'No,' replied the maid; 'the pavilion is not used often. It stands empty, so I heard, unless Yang has a prisoner of especial importance.'

'I've got to get a peep into that place, somehow or other,' reflected Jack. 'It may be Lew; it's uncommonly likely that it is Lew.'

'Where is the Red Pavilion?' he asked Pao-Chu.

'I do not know,' replied the Chinese lady; but at once the maid began a description of its position, and Jack listened intently.

'Could I get to that part of the compound without going through the hall again?' asked Jack.

'Yes,' said the maid; 'there is a passage from that door,' and she pointed to a door at the farther corner of the room, 'which runs out quite near to the wall which separates the women's garden from the Red Pavilion. There is no door in the wall, but it would be quite easy for you to climb over it.'

'Pao-Chu,' said Jack, 'I am almost certain that my companion, who shared in your rescue from the river-wolves, is shut up in that pavilion, and that Yang means harm to him. Will you

not help me to find out whether he is there or not ?'

'How can I help you ?' asked Pao-Chu.

'Let your maid see if the passage is clear. If I can gain the garden at a spot near the pavilion I will take care of myself after that.'

Pao-Chu at once told the younger maid to do as Jack wished, and the woman went away. In three minutes she returned, saying that everything was quiet in that part of the house, and the garden was empty.

'Show him the way,' said Pao-Chu ; and Jack, after thanking his kind helper most heartily, followed the maid along a dusky passage, which ended at a door opening into the garden. Out he went, and plunged into a thick shrubbery growing under the wall which bounded the garden. He reached the wall, and saw the Red Pavilion at once, for the wall was not solid. It was ornamented, in Chinese fashion, by many perforations where bricks had been left out, the openings forming an elaborate pattern. Jack looked through a perforation, and saw a small building covered on both sides and roof with scarlet tiles—the Red Pavilion.

Yes, there it was, but the entrance was on the other side ; and now he saw a tall figure come into sight, pacing slowly round the pavilion. It was the one-handed runner, keeping close guard

over the place, and at every fresh turn of the game Jack felt more certain of the identity of the prisoner. Within five minutes it was made absolutely certain.

Jack was crouching in shelter of the bushes, watching the runner as he came into sight and disappeared on his steady, unceasing round, when a low murmur of voices came to his ear. Two men were approaching on the other side of the wall, talking softly together, and Jack sharpened his ears to catch their words. He started as he recognised the voices; they were those of Yang and Ah Foo, and through the perforations he could hear their words as they came up. When they were within sight of the pavilion they halted.

'So he is in there?' said the deep voice of Ah Foo.

'Yes,' replied Yang.

'Can he gain any idea that he is in your compound?'

'None at all,' replied the mandarin. 'It was night, and his eyes were bandaged when he was carried in. All he can describe is a pavilion in a garden, and there are a thousand pavilions in a thousand gardens in the neighbourhood.'

'Have you sent to his father?'

'That matter is already in hand.'

Jack nodded to himself. 'Just as I thought,' flashed through his mind; 'just as I thought.'

'We must be careful about General Liu,' remarked the pirate captain with a low, deep chuckle; 'we must not let General Liu get hold of this.'

'No, no,' muttered Yang in low, agitated tones. 'I had no idea the viceroy was in the neighbourhood, or I would never have brought the white boy into my Yamen. I would have hidden him with the priest, as we first intended.'

'Have no fear,' said Ah Foo. 'How should General Liu find out anything? It is impossible. Besides, at present he is too much surprised to think of such matters;' and Ah Foo chuckled again with immense relish.

'Surprised! Ay, he must have been,' rejoined Yang. 'And he had ordered you to the headsman? *Hi-yah!* Liu ordered you to the headsman!' In spite of his uncasiness, the mandarin broke into a cackling laugh.

'To the headsman!' came the soft, deep voice; and Ah Foo chuckled again.

'But he knew you at once?' said Yang.

'Oh yes, as soon as I spoke,' replied Ah Foo; 'and then he almost fell to the ground.'

'*Hi-yah!*' sniggered the mandarin. 'I should like to have seen that. A strange meeting truly; a strange meeting. And had Liu any reason to suspect your presence in the neighbourhood?'

'None at all,' replied Ah Foo; 'there is no one

but you who knows that I have returned to China.'

'A surprise for Liu that time!' exclaimed the mandarin; 'surely he will never have a greater! To think that he was delivering his own brother over to the headsman! I should like to have seen his face.'

He moved away, and Ah Foo went with him, leaving Jack filled with a surprise as deep as that felt by the viceroy when that familiar voice challenged the great official. So this was the reason of Liu's perturbation and strange conduct! Ah Foo was the brother of the powerful governor!

Then, Ah Foo, too, must have been a man of great estate, and had fallen headlong from power to poverty and obscurity, as often happens when some evil-doing official is stripped of his rank and wealth.

But Jack had no time to stay and think about this strange sidelight on Ah Foo's mysterious personality. He knew where Lew was, and he must make instant use of that most important piece of knowledge. In the bosom of his robes he had stowed away his little pocket-book. He sat down on the ground, took it out, tore away a leaf, and wrote a few words with the pencil fitted in the back of the book. Now he must get back to the spot where he had left Wong.

Under cover of the long rows of shrubs, he

crept along the wall till he came to a banyan whose branches spread across the wall and extended over the turf of the main compound. Jack climbed the tree, crawled along a branch, and dropped into the wider enclosure, across which he worked with infinite care, and at last arrived at the point where he had entered. Over the wall he went, and found Wong seated just as he had left him. In two minutes Wong had plunged into the narrow streets and was making for the city gate, with the tiny scrap of paper secured in the thick braid of his pigtail.

Jack went with him until they were clear of the neighbourhood of the Yamen. Then he worked back towards the magistrate's house by another route, which brought him out right in front of the entrance, where runners lounged and every one who had business at the place went in and out. On the other side of the open space which lay before the gates a boy-lama now squatted under a wall as if taking a rest, a figure so ordinary and familiar that no one thought of giving it a second glance. So Jack set himself to watch all movement to and from the place of Lew's captivity.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR CHAO.

AT the very time when Jack was watching the Yamen with steady gaze, Mr Standing was pacing his own room in a state of deep anxiety. He was terribly worried not only by the strange disappearance of Lew, but by the absence of Jack also. The story he had heard from Mr Mackenzie and Jim Wallace showed that Lew had been seized by unfriendly hands, and was being very roughly treated, and now Jack had not returned with the viceroy's troops. Mr Standing saw what it meant; the patrol-leader had gone in search of the key to this mystery, and perhaps he, too, would fall into the cruel hands which had been laid upon his friend.

There was a sound of feet in the courtyard without, and a sedan-chair was borne in upon the shoulders of four coolies. From this chair descended a stout, bland gentleman, clad in very handsome robes of richly worked blue satin, a fan in his hand, and huge goggles on his eyes. Presently his card was brought in, the card being a large sheet of paper inscribed with its owner's name in Chinese characters; and Mr Standing

learned that the stranger desired to see him on important business. He was shown into the room, and the usual number of ceremonious bows were exchanged before the well-dressed caller entered upon his errand.

'Your humble slave, whose name is Chao, is the owner of a small and wretched estate near Yang-teng,' he began. Mr Standing nodded. He quite understood that this mode of speaking of one's self as of no account is a form of Chinese politeness. 'Last week,' continued the stranger, 'those villainous creatures, unworthy of the name of men, who call themselves the Harmonious Brethren, descended upon my poor house and did such damage that the most hardened heart would be shocked to see, and at which the most unfeeling man would weep as if he had lost his father and mother in one day.'

The stranger stopped and drew a long breath, and shook his head sadly; but his countenance still wore the expansive smile which had covered it from ear to ear since the moment of his entrance. It was intended to win confidence in its owner as a guileless man.

'Ah, Yang-teng,' said Mr Standing, 'that is near the house where Mr Martyn lived. I remember the name now.'

'Ah, the dreadful mischief! oh, the cruel destruction!' murmured the Chinese gentleman. 'I

passed it as I came hither; my heart was torn to see the ruins of that beautiful house. And yesterday a band of the infamous Brethren came to my house again, and forced me to accompany them to the cottage of a peasant who lives five miles beyond Yang-teng in a lonely place far among the hills.'

The stranger paused, sighed, and fanned himself gently. Mr Standing was watching him keenly. The merchant felt at once that something lay behind all this.

'In that cottage, bound in the most cruel manner, so that he could move neither hand nor foot, lay a white boy whom the Brethren had seized.'

Mr Standing started violently. 'It was'—— he exclaimed, and stopped. He knew that the utmost care was needed here.

'Yes,' said the gaily clad gentleman, fanning himself more gently still; 'it was your son. I said to them, "Brutal men, unbind the boy;" but they only made a mock of my words. Then they said to me, "You will do our bidding, to the very letter, or we will come again to Yang-teng and leave no two stones of your house standing together." What could I do but tremble and obey?'

'What is your message?' said Mr Standing in a low voice.

'A cruel one, a terrible one to be compelled to repeat to a father,' said Mr Chao; 'the Brethren need money to carry on their campaign; at any rate, that is the reason given by those evil men, and they demand that you send twenty bags, with a thousand dollars in each bag, to the ruined house of the missionary. There they will bring your son, and an exchange will be made at once. If nothing is done by the fifth day from then, they will send you his left foot. On the tenth day you will receive his right hand; on the fifteenth day, his head.'

Mr Chao murmured these particulars with the gentle suavity of a man who recounts what has happened at a morning call; but Mr Standing's lips went dry and his face white. If the villains had hold of Lew, all this might happen easily enough, and the merchant knew it. He looked at Mr Chao, and decided that he was no more what he represented himself to be than Mr Standing himself was; but that made the affair all the more difficult and awkward to handle.

'Will you come with me to the magistrate and depose to this?' demanded Mr Standing.

'Nothing would please me better,' replied Mr Chao most smoothly. 'But I may not; I dare not. The Brethren have sworn that if I should go near a magistrate, or if you should set the Yamen in motion on the matter, your son's life

will pay for it instantly. They will at once send you his head, and disappear among the hills.'

Mr Standing bit his lip in perplexity. It was all so likely, and might easily be so true. A band of Brethren could commit a most diabolical murder, and then vanish like the mist in the sun; and it would be utterly impossible to call them to account.

'The time is short to raise so great a sum of money,' said the merchant.

Mr Chao smiled, and waved his fan. He implied by his gesture that he could give no credit to that statement—that to the vast resources of the wealthy foreigner it would be a mere trifle.

Every moment Mr Standing became more and more suspicious of the plausible rascal. He felt certain that he was an accomplice of Lew's kidnapper; but that did not help him to a conclusion with regard to the best line of action.

'Would that I could help you!' breathed Mr Chao; 'but I myself stand in a position of great danger. If the Brethren had the slightest suspicion that I was playing them false, my life and my property would pay the forfeit; and they have their spies everywhere. If we went to the magistrate, perhaps the very secretary who took down our statement might be an agent of theirs; perhaps the runner attending in the court. In

any case, our action would become known, and they would take a terrible revenge.'

Mr Standing pressed his hand over his eyes. He was thinking hard.

'Take a few hours to consider matters,' said Mr Chao in his gentle, sympathetic voice. 'I am not returning to Yang-teng until to-morrow. Your son's life is safe, at any rate, until the fifth day from this; though his suffering from his bonds is very great, and his captors are harsh men.'

Mr Standing winced, but the Chinaman did not appear to notice the action.

'Where are you staying?' asked the merchant.

'At the tea-house kept by Ching-Lu at the top of the Street of the Water-Gate,' replied Mr Chao.

'I will see you there this evening,' said Mr Standing; and the interview came to an end.

As soon as the Chinaman had gone, Mr Standing went at once to consult with some of his friends on this difficult situation; but he had not walked twenty yards from the compound gate when a coolie shuffled up to him, pressed something into his hand, and then vanished as if the earth had swallowed him.

For a moment Mr Standing stared with wonder at the object between his fingers. It was a very dirty scrap of crumpled paper. He opened

it and smoothed it out; he saw a line or two of pencilled writing, and his eyes devoured the words. He started, and read them again and then again.

'By George!' he muttered, 'this puts another face on things. Jack's a king; he's run 'em to earth.'

Again he read the words. 'Ho-Chow, outside Yang's Yamen, Wednesday—about noon. Lew is shut up in the Red Pavilion in the Yamen. Yang has kidnapped him. I've just found it out. J. B.'

Mr Standing would have known the writing even if it had not been initialed. He looked everywhere for the man who had brought the note. He looked in vain. Wong dared not show up openly at present; he feared inquiry and examination at any hands. He might be denounced again as an accomplice of the pirates, and he could not expect to keep his head on his shoulders every time.

'Where's that confounded liar and humbug Chao got to, I wonder?' thought Mr Standing. 'I thought he was a dead-beat while he was yarning away so smooth and easy. Jack wrote this about two hours ago in Ho-Chow, and the rogue was talking about a place five miles beyond Yang-teng. Well, it looks as if this thread will take a bit of untwisting.'

He stood for a few moments in deep thought, then pulled himself quickly together.

'Say, I've got to hustle now,' murmured Mr Standing. 'General Liu's the man for me;' and away he went as fast as he could walk.

CHAPTER XXVII

DRAWN BLANK.

THE afternoon crept on hour by hour, and still the boy-lama sat at his post. He was hungry; he was cruelly thirsty in the burning heat. But he was a Scout, and his discomfort counted nothing against the need of keeping a faithful watch to discover whether Lew was removed from the Yamen or not.

As he sat there, his mind went over and over the points he had discovered upon overhearing the conversation between Ah Foo and the mandarin. Ah Foo, then, was really a member of the great Liu family; and, next, he had left China, and his own brother did not know that he had returned. Did it mean that he had been exiled? Jack whistled softly, for he knew that to be an exile in China is a very serious thing indeed. He knew that an exile has emblazoned upon his breast an indelible mark, and a man so marked may not return unless he receives a special pardon from the imperial court. Should an exile return with no pardon to protect him, his life is forfeit, and any one may slay him as if he were a mad dog. The mark upon

his breast, if discovered, is his sure and certain death-warrant unless he can produce his safe-conduct. If this were so, it was no wonder that General Liu had been staggered, and that he had hastened to give his brother the strip of inscribed silk, which would protect Ah Foo anywhere within the province over which the viceroy ruled.

'I wonder if Ah Foo bears the brand of exile on his breast,' thought Jack; 'it looks uncommonly like it.'

About the middle of the afternoon there occurred the first movement from the Yamen which made the Scout uneasy. There had been plenty of coming and going of persons on foot; but Jack knew well there was no fear of Lew being removed in that manner, and, besides, the people were all runners or townspeople who had business with the magistrate, save one; and that one was the priest who had come to the Yamen with Ah Foo. He stepped slowly out of the broad entrance, folded his hands in the sleeves of his gown, and moved gently towards the gates as if he were returning homeward. Jack watched closely to see if his companion, the pirate captain, would appear, but there was no sign of Ah Foo.

But now a chair was borne out on the shoulders of two coolies. Jack eyed it sharply; but the

curtains were drawn back, and he could see the occupant plainly—a lady of rank, whose dark, smoothly braided hair was decked with flowers and gems. Had the curtains of the door been drawn, Jack would have followed it, and even now he wished that Wong was at hand to send in pursuit. But it seemed useless to follow a chair in which perhaps the mandarin's wife was going out to pay a call, and Jack kept his place.

The next person to come into sight was a man whom Jack knew well; it was the one-handed runner. He was followed by a subordinate, and both went to a railed-off space near the entrance, where a prisoner was suffering in the standing-cage. This punishment is one of exquisite torture. The victim is placed in a tall framework of wood, which is about the width of his body and some seven feet high. The top of the cage fits closely round his neck like a pillory, and beneath his feet is a heap of thin, flat stones on which he stands. Each day a stone is knocked out, so that at length he is left hanging by the head, and is very slowly strangled.

The man now in the cage had been accused of taking a share in the attack on P'eng's house-boat. As a matter of fact, he had done nothing of the sort, and Yang knew it very well, for the real criminals had been in his pay and under his

protection; but a victim was needed to show that the mandarin was not overlooking so terrible a crime, and an unlucky coolie had been falsely accused and instantly condemned.

The unhappy wretch had now been twenty-four hours on tiptoes, for he could just reach the stone on which he supported himself; but now he was about to lose even that. The second runner bent, pulled out a stone, and tossed it on the heap of those already withdrawn. The victim now hung by his head, and deep, hollow, strangling groans burst from his lips. No one took the smallest notice of his agony. The passers-by scarcely gave him a glance, and the runner, having withdrawn the stone, sat down on the ground, leaned his back against the side of the frame, and placidly dozed in the sun. The one-handed man cast a glance of official examination to see that the sufferer was throttling properly; then strolled back into the Yamen.

Half-an-hour later, a small, blue-clad figure glided up to Jack, and squatted down beside him. Jack was delighted to see his faithful follower.

'Hallo, Wong,' he said, 'I'm glad to see you back, I can tell you. Did you give the note to Mr Standing?'

'I put it in his own hand,' said Wong, 'but I did not stay to speak to him; it is not safe for me to do that.'

'No,' agreed Jack, in whose ears the moans of the 'dying Chinaman were still ringing, and who knew that there were people who would make short work of Wong if the smallest suspicion came up against him; 'but Mr Standing will soon get some of them on the jump.'

'The soldiers of General Liu are not far from Ho-Chow,' said Wong. 'I passed a camp of them as I came back, not three miles from the city.'

'So near!' cried Jack in surprise; 'but Liu himself was going to Wushan, I heard.'

Wong shook his head; he knew nothing of the viceroy's movements.

Two hours later a sudden hubbub arose in the direction of the city gates. Sunset was near; but it was not the hurrying of people to enter or leave the city before the gates were closed—it was the uproar of the citizens at some unexpected sight. From their place Jack and Wong could look straight down the narrow, banner-hung street which led to the gates. Suddenly they saw the head of a swiftly marching body of troops.

On came the soldiers with remarkable speed for Chinese soldiery, and when they came to the front of the Yamen they executed a movement which must have been carefully planned, and was carried out with real promptness and skill; for

without the usual fuss and bustle. of uproarious command, the marching lines split in two, and each section swept swiftly around the outer walls of the Yamen till the great compound was ringed about with a close cordon of troops. This movement, really a striking one to be carried out by Chinese troops, proved that General Liu's fame as an able commander was well deserved.

From all parts of the city a great throng swiftly gathered to look upon this strange sight, and Jack and Wong had sprung forward and found places for themselves in the front ranks, closely packed behind the cordon of soldiers who held the Yamen in their encircling grip. People came out of the great gates, but were ordered back by the officers in charge of the troops. Others attempted to gain the magistrate's residence, and were at once repulsed; it was clear that all who were in the Yamen were to stay in; all who were out were to stay out. General Liu had cast his net, and none could pass the meshes.

Jack had watched all this with shining eyes and a fast-beating heart. He suspected what it all meant, and within ten minutes his suspicions became a certainty. There was a fresh outburst of excited cries in the direction of the gates, and presently three chairs were borne into sight, carried through the ranks, and set down in the

open space before the Yamen. From these chairs stepped out General Liu, Mr Standing, and Jim Wallace. Jack was ready to dance for joy. Here was checkmate with a vengeance for the old rogue of a mandarin. A complete cordon of troops round his compound, and Lew shut up in the Red Pavilion! Yang could not escape this time, for it was clear that the viceroy meant to make a strict search and see that no one slipped through the toils he had cleverly flung around the Yamen.

The general and his companions immediately entered the Yamen, and fully a hundred men marched in after them. The great gates were at once closed, and the chattering, excited crowd could see nothing save the lines of silent soldiery standing steady and watchful around the walls.

Nearly an hour passed; to Jack it seemed like three. The sun set; the gates were closed. Still there was no sign from the Yamen. Suddenly the doors were flung open. Jack looked eagerly, but it was only an officer coming out alone. He gave an order, and the troops at once began to march away to take up their quarters in an open space within the walls. The vast majority of the crowd followed the retiring troops, and soon the space before the Yamen was almost empty.

Presently the figure of a European appeared in

the gate of the Yamen, and strolled, smoking, towards the chair in which he had been carried to the spot. It was Jim Wallace, and Jack slipped forward and placed himself in Jim's way, holding up his begging dish. Jim glanced at the beggar, and in the dim light saw a boy-lama with bare, shaven head, bare feet, and ragged robes.

'Hook it, my young friend,' said Jim, making a gesture of refusal. He expected the gesture to be understood; but certainly not the words. He nearly dropped his cigar when Jack said, 'Hallo, Jim, have you got Lew?' Then he added quickly, 'Steady on, Jim; steady on! Don't give me away.'

Jim Wallace coughed up the smoke he had swallowed in his surprise, and snorted, 'Jack! Say, Jack, is it you?'

'No one else,' replied the patrol-leader.

'Great Scot! What on earth are you doing in that rig?'

'I'm on scout after Lew.'

'Why, Jack,' muttered Jim, 'how in thunder did you come to let us down with this bump? Lew isn't here at all.'

'Not in the Red Pavilion?' gasped Jack.

'No sign of him, nor in any other pavilion. Old Liu has searched the place inside and out, so that a rat couldn't have been hidden any-

where. Besides, a man came down from Yang-teng to-day to tell Standing that Lew had been bagged by the Brethren, and to demand twenty thousand dollars as ransom for him.'

'That's all a lie,' said Jack sharply. 'He's been bagged by old Yang, and that old thief is after the money.'

'What makes you think that?' said Jim.

Jack heard voices, and saw several figures approaching them.

'Can't stop to tell you now,' he whispered. 'I must be off. Drop something in my bowl to cover my retreat.'

Jim fumbled in a pocket, and dropped a handful of loose cash into the bowl with a clatter; and Jack went off with the correct air of a mendicant who has had a stroke of luck. He gained the shadow of a wall on the other side of the open space, and squatted again to watch all that went on.

He felt dreadfully crestfallen. He had started Mr Standing and Jim Wallace on a most extraordinary wild-goose chase. They had clearly beaten up the quarters of General Liu, and the general had gone right into the matter, set troops in motion, blockaded the Yamen, searched it, and all for nothing; no Lew there, after all. Jack felt wild with himself, and yet through it all he could not but believe Lew had been there when

he wrote the note. But how had Lew been removed? The woman in the chair—that was the only thing that Jack could think of. The chair was roomy. Had Lew been bound and gagged and packed away in it and carried off in perfect secrecy, while the Chinese lady stared placidly out from it?

‘I’ve been a donkey,’ reflected Jack; ‘the curtains were too open, far too open. I ought to have smelt a rat. A woman only draws the curtains aside for a peep. It was meant for every one to see her and think it was only a woman in the chair.’

As these thoughts went through his mind, he saw the cavalcade of chairs move away towards the general’s camp where the white men were to stay with him. Jack was not the only person to feel crestfallen; it was a very bad quarter of an hour for Mr Standing. Yang’s Yamen had been searched, and no sign of his son had been found, and though General Liu’s politeness and hospitality had borne the strain wonderfully well, there was a suggestion in his manner that Mr Standing had been cleverly deceived by some interested person.

Before leaving Wushan, an attempt had been made to interview the smooth-spoken, satin-clothed Mr Chao of Yang-teng. The tea-house at the head of the Street of the Water-Gate had been

drawn blank. 'It was clear that though Chao had given it 'as a meeting-place, he was not staying there at all, but watching it, ready as he thought best to meet or to avoid those who came to see him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COFFIN IN THE TEMPLE.

JACK sat on in the deepening dusk, his mind turning over every possibility of the situation. He had taken care to preserve his disguise, for it might be of great service yet. Once he had been found talking in English with Jim Wallace, his incognito would have been completely destroyed. Now he wondered if it would be better to seek Liu's camp, come out into the open, and tell all he knew to Lew's friends and the viceroy.

He dismissed the idea swiftly. He saw that such a course of action might easily lead to the utter destruction of his friend. The inquiries which would at once be set on foot would show Yang that something was known, and that there was evidence against him. Now Lew was in Yang's power; Jack was quite sure of that; twenty things went to show it. But if Yang gave orders that Lew was to be put out of the way, it could be done secretly, and no proof of the crime would ever come to light. Then Yang had only to continue his protestations of innocence, and no inquiry in the world would

bring anything home to him. And again there was the viceroy: if he once knew that his brother was tangled up in it, would he move as he had been moving? Jack knew he would not. No, there was nothing for it but to pursue the track, searching once again for the line, and then following it up until the new prison to which Lew had been conveyed was discovered.

Jack had arrived at this conclusion just as Wong trotted up and dropped beside him. The fisherman had followed the crowd which had marched with the troops, and he now reported the movements of the soldiery.

'So, the white boy has been taken from the Yamen, master?' said Wong.

'Looks like it, Wong,' replied Jack with a sigh; 'and he must have been carried out in a woman's chair.'

He described the chair and its burden and its bearers. Suddenly the fisherman interrupted him with a sharp exclamation.

'*Hi-yah!*' cried Wong. 'I met that chair on the road outside the city.'

'You did?' said Jack quickly; 'and outside the city? Which way was it going, Wong?'

'It was on the road to the Yen village, the place where the white boy was kept before,' replied Wong.

'By Jove!' muttered Jack. 'I wonder if

they've carried Lew there again?' He pondered for a few moments, then struck his knee with his fist. Something else had come into his mind. He had heard Yang himself say that he had wished Lew had been left with the priest! What priest? Surely the man who had looked in upon Jack when he was searching the house where Lew had been shut up; the priest who had been Ah Foo's companion that morning in the walk to Ho-Chow and Yang's Yamen; the priest who had set out from the magistrate's house half-an-hour before the chair had been carried away.

He put all this to Wong, who agreed that it was a most probable move, a clever and subtle move, quite in keeping with Chinese tactics.' The Yen village having been suspected and searched would be one of the last places to be suspected and searched again; and even if it were so, who could tell in what part of it the captive might be hidden.

'We'll go back in the morning and scout round there again, Wong,' said Jack; 'but we must know something definite before we move into the open. Otherwise we might do Lew the most terrible harm instead of good.'

'Yang would kill him sooner than be found out,' remarked the fisherman.

'Just what I think,' said Jack. 'Well, everybody who's in the city is in safe and sound till

sunrise comes and the gates are opened. We'll get something to eat and drink and take a rest before we go on duty again.'

'Will you return to the house of Ho, master?' asked Wong.

'No,' said Jack decisively; 'you never know what may happen, and we don't want to get Ho into trouble. There is a little inn in the street which runs from the Yamen to the city wall. We'll go there.'

They sought the street, an evil-smelling roadway, not more than six feet wide, and turned in at the door of the inn. There were a number of customers there, looking, like themselves, of the poorer order, and they attracted no notice in the dim light of a faintly burning paper lantern. Jack ordered food and drink, and they were brought—rice, fish, beans, and tea—rough food and rudely served, for it was a poor place; but Jack's hunger and thirst were such that everything seemed delicious. When they had despatched their supper, two thick straw mats were hired from the landlord, and placed in as quiet a corner as they could find. Upon these they lay down, and were asleep in an instant.

An hour before sunrise they were afoot again. Early as it was, the landlord of the inn was up, and a large pan of rice was simmering over a tiny handful of fire. They made a breakfast

much of the same kind as their supper had been, paid the bill, which came to one hundred and twenty cash—about threepence—and went out into the street.

They turned into a cross-alley and went along it, making for the main street, which ran down to the gate opening on the road they wished to follow. The alley ran into the street within sixty yards of the gate, and Jack, ever moving warily while this dangerous city encompassed them, glanced round the corner before he entered the street. He took a single glance, then turned on his heel, and drew back into the shelter of the alley. At the city gate stood a group of early travellers—coolies, chairmen, merchants, labourers going out to work in the fields, and towering above the tallest there stood Ah Foo.

Why was he on the road so early? And whither was he going? To Jack the thing looked clearer and clearer. If Ah Foo took the road to the Yen village, then Lew was not far away from the hamlet; he may be sure of that.

Ten minutes passed, and there was a rattle of bolts and a creaking of rusty hinges. The gates were flung open, and the outgoing stream of early travellers met an incoming stream of country-folk bringing in their produce, and not until the latter had passed the mouth of the alley did Jack and the fisherman venture from

their cover. The gateway was empty, and in the distance they could see the folk streaming along the road. Farthest away of all was the pirate captain, striding along at full speed. They let him go out of sight, then hurried after him, and to track him was easy enough, for the way was full of turns and passed through groves of bamboo and between fields of tall millet, so that it afforded ample cover for them should he turn his head. But he never looked behind him, and, indeed, he could have no idea that he was likely to be followed, for he had never seen either of them in Ho-Chow that day, and could not dream that the boy-lama was Jack Burnet.

By the time the hamlet was gained, Jack was willing enough to take a rest. The sun was now well up, and its fierce rays were of tremendous power; seasoned as he was, the Scout felt the great heat, and, besides, Ah Foo had brought them along at a good pace. Jack and the fisherman halted in the grateful shade of a huge banyan, and discussed their next move.

'I don't know why, Wong,' said Jack, 'but I'm as certain as I stand here that Lew has been brought back to this place, and that the priest has charge of him.'

The fisherman nodded, but said nothing. His keen black eyes were fixed on his young leader's face as he waited for orders.

'Wong,' said Jack, 'how many temples are there in this village?'

'Two,' replied the little man; 'one to the T'u-ti, the local god, and one to the god of war.'

'Where are they?' asked Jack. 'I saw no sign of a temple in the village itself.'

'They are outside the village,' replied Wong. 'Do you see that grove of banyan-trees?' and he pointed to a huge, green cloud of leaves to the right of the hamlet.

Jack nodded.

'The temple of the local god is in that grove.' Then he turned and pointed to the left of the close-packed cluster of houses. 'The temple of the god of war is behind that little hill covered with orange-trees.'

'We'll take a temple apiece,' said Jack. 'I believe Lew Standing is shut up in one or the other. I'll tackle the temple of the war-god; you take the T'u-ti. We must lose no time, for Ah Foo may strike for the place now that he has reached the village.'

They parted at once, agreeing to meet at the spot where Jack's clothes were hidden, and if one should gain that place first he was to come on to the temple he had not visited.

It was farther than it looked to the little hill of the orange-trees, and it took Jack fully five-and-twenty minutes to gain its crown. From it

he saw the temple at once. The latter stood upon an opposite slope, and Jack went swiftly down the hill, across the little valley, and then cautiously up to the entrance of the temple. The door stood ajar, and he peeped in. He saw no one; heard no sound. He thrust the door more widely open and entered. The temple was apparently empty and silent.

Facing him, the image of the war-god, a hideously carved and bedizened figure, was placed on its pedestal; at one side were three or four great carved and gilded coffins, and beside them rested images of animals constructed of reeds and paper.

Jack knew well what these were. Some wealthy patrons of the temple had had their coffins already prepared and stored in the sacred precincts, in advance of the time when their use would be called for, and the figures of animals would be burned at the funerals. The idea is that these figures will be transported to the spirit world, and there serve their owners as the real animals served them in this world.

At first glance it seemed useless to search for Lew there, so naked did the place appear. But Jack stepped swiftly across to the coffins, and raised the lid of the nearest and peered in. It was empty. He looked into a second. That, too, was empty. In letting the lid down, it

slipped through his fingers and fell into place with a hollow bang.

The echoes had not died away, when a figure leapt into sight with mysterious swiftness. It was the priest, and he appeared to spring from behind the pedestal on which the god was placed. Clearly he had not heard Jack's entrance, and the sound of the falling lid had aroused him.

At first the appearance of the Scout entirely deceived him. He saw the shaven head, the familiar dress, and he thought of the new-comer only as a meddlesome intruder. He ordered Jack in angry tones to leave the coffin alone.

Jack's answer was to slip swiftly across to the other side of the temple. He had caught sight of a coffin thrust into a dusky corner, and by means of a block of wood its lid was propped a few inches open. Why? Jack meant to see.

His hand was outstretched to seize the lid, when he felt himself caught in a fierce grip; the priest had hurled himself upon this boy-monk who was prying into secrets the priest had been set to guard. His agitation had already shown that there was something in the wind; he was yelling like a madman.

'Out!' he screamed. 'Out! out!' and strove to drag Jack away from the coffin. At first he succeeded. He was a tall, sinewy fellow; he had

seized the Scout from behind, and he hauled Jack five or six yards across the paved floor.

With a dexterous twist, Jack spun round in his captor's grip, lowered his shaven head, and used it as a battering-ram. He charged home, took the priest fairly in the wind, and sent him reeling.

Jack now stood on guard, ready for a fresh assault, but none was made. The priest was not much of a fighting man. As soon as he had recovered his breath, he made three bounds to the door and was gone.

Jack did not pursue. Better to search the place while he had the chance, and he rushed to the coffin, thrust his fingers in at the opening, and swung back the heavy lid.

A yell of joy burst from his lips as he glanced into the long, deep box. 'Lew! Lew!' he cried. Yes, there lay his lost companion, bound, gagged, helpless in the depths of the great coffin.

Into the coffin Jack vaulted, and out came his knife, which he had secured in a fold of his gown. In a trice bonds and gag were cut away, and he was hauling the missing Scout into the light.

'Jack, old boy!' gasped Lew, and could say no more. He was all but spent by his frightful experience in the cruel hands into which he had fallen.

'I felt sure you were not far off!' cried Jack in triumph. 'Come on, Lew, we must be off, for that old rogue of a priest may soon be back with a crowd at his heels, and Ah Foo is in the village.'

Lew tried to spring to his feet, but sank down again. His ankles had been bound together for many hours, and were benumbed and useless.

CHAPTER XXIX.

STROKE AND COUNTERSTROKE.

JACK bent over his Brother Scout, swung him up, and managed to pack him on his shoulders. Then he marched at once from the temple, and pushed on as fast as he could go along the track which led to the spot where he was to meet Wong.

It was a forced march which, though of no great length, Jack never forgot. The day was one of broiling, burning, scorching heat. Within a hundred yards the sweat began to pour in huge drops from the Scout's forehead, hardy as he was. Within two hundred yards Lew began to seem a terrible dead-weight upon his shoulders. By the time he had gone a quarter of a mile, he was gasping and panting for breath.

'Put me down, Jack,' begged Lew. 'You are killing yourself, dragging me along on this awful day. Put me down and shift for yourself. Listen, there are the horns!'

Yes, the horns were blowing in the village; the priest had raised the alarm, and pursuers were afoot. Ah Foo and his friends would soon be on their track.

'Not much,' snorted Jack. 'I'll get you off or stop with you;' and he struggled forward with splendid pluck, his eyes fixed on a deep grove of bamboos into which the path disappeared, the grove where he was to meet Wong.

'No, no, Jack, you can't do it,' protested Lew. 'It's uphill from here to the trees. Jack,' he added sharply, 'there's some one coming; I think it's Ah Foo!'

Jack snatched a glance. At the far end of the track a figure had flashed into sight, running at great speed. There was no mistaking that gigantic form; it was the pirate captain hard upon their trail. The boys knew it not, but he had met the priest, had sent him to gather searchers, and hurried on himself.

He was alone, but he would need no aid against two boys, one helpless and the other almost exhausted by this fierce burst under a cruel sun, whose rays smote like sharp arrows.

Then the patrol-leader set his teeth savagely, and drove himself furiously at the task which lay before him. He would gain the trees or go down utterly spent to the last ounce of his strength.

Stride by stride he won forward. The slope was easy, but it seemed of torturing steepness. The weight of his helpless comrade appeared to increase moment by moment. The hot sweat ran

into his eyes, smarting and blinding; it ran into his open mouth, and tasted salt to his tongue and upon his sun-baked lips. His heart thumped in his body till he felt as if it would burst. But the indomitable Scout pushed on and on, slowly perhaps, yet drawing nearer and still nearer to the desired haven.

He gained it, and staggered into the shelter of the bamboos; their pursuer was still a full hundred yards away. He made a few steps, then turned aside from the path, reeled behind a clump of low brushwood, and dropped to the ground. He could do no more.

It proved to be enough for the moment. Within a few seconds Ah Foo raced by, his fierce eyes fixed on the windings of the path, for in the grove one could scarcely see ten yards ahead. The very nearness of their halt to the edge of the trees deceived him. He thought Jack would push farther into the wood before attempting to hide, and on he went, and at the next moment the soft thud of his shoes died away along the path.

'He's gone, Jack,' breathed Lew.

'Yes, but not for long,' gasped the patrol-leader. 'We've got to clear out of this.'

He lay for two or three moments, panting fiercely; then sat up, and took hold of Lew's ankles and began to rub them.

'They're better now,' said Lew; 'I believe I could walk.'

The belief was vain. He tried to scramble to his feet, but fell at once.

'You can't,' said Jack.

'Well, if I can't walk,' declared Lew stubbornly, 'I can crawl;' and he began to work his way forward on all fours.

'Come on, then,' said his companion. 'Any way of moving is good which takes us deeper among the trees;' and they went a good fifty yards before they stopped.

Here they hid in a little hollow, and for five minutes Jack rubbed and chafed Lew's benumbed limbs until the blood was moving briskly. All the time Lew was devouring his friend and leader with eyes full of wonder.

'Say, Jack,' he murmured, 'your rig's a masterpiece. When you poked your head over the side of the coffin I should never have known you if you hadn't spoken. Where did you get it?'

'Picked it up in Ho-Chow. I've been doing a bit of scouting on your trail, and had to dress the part, or I shouldn't have got far,' replied Jack.

'Where's your hair?' said Lew.

'Shaved it off,' chuckled Jack. 'Never mind; it'll soon grow again, and no hair on your nut is nice and cool in this weather.'

'Say, Jack, you're no end of a good chum!' said Lew.

'Pooh!' replied the patrol-leader. 'Dry up—you'd have done the same for me. How do you feel now for making a move?'

'Any amount better,' replied Lew; and now when he got to his feet he could walk, though it was but slowly.

They marched forward, and within a dozen yards they came to a path. So faintly was it marked that they stepped on to it before they knew it was there, and as they glanced up and down it a Chinaman came round a bend not thirty yards away.

The new-comer gave a savage yell of delight, and dashed at them. It was their arch-enemy; he was swiftly searching the paths with which the grove was honeycombed, and, unhappily, chance had flung the Scouts into his hands. Lew turned to hobble back among the trees. Jack leapt forward to cover his partially disabled companion; but Ah Foo came upon them with a whirlwind rush, charged Jack down, and strode on to clutch Lew by the neck.

Up sprang Jack, to see that Ah Foo had already swung Lew over his shoulder, and that, struggling and kicking, Lew was being borne away by his captor. To the giant strength of the pirate captain the weight of the Boy Scout was



U.S. Army soldier (left) and a Japanese soldier (right) are shown in a wooded area. The Japanese soldier is holding a long object, possibly a rifle or pole.

a mere trifle, and he ran swiftly through the trees towards the path by which all three had entered the wood. Jack followed with equal speed. He had regained his wind, and now he put forth every effort to overtake the huge runner.

Ah Foo glanced over his shoulder at the Chinese boy who pursued him, the boy who had discovered the hiding-place of his captive. He was immensely puzzled, for he had not recognised Jack, and believed it was a native who had been employed to ferret out the secret of Lew's captivity. But he meant to make sure of securing the victim he wished to seize; he would hurry to meet his men, hand over Lew to them, then turn and take terrible vengeance on this boy-lama. If the latter came up to him, Ah Foo had no fear that he could hinder the carrying away of Lew Standing, for the boy had only his bare hands to employ against the pirate captain's immense strength.

But the battle is not always to the strong, though this time the race was to the swift, for Jack was faster on his legs than the big Chinaman. He caught up Ah Foo as the latter sprung from the trees and turned into the path. With a dexterous hook movement, Jack slipped his toe round Ah Foo's right ankle, and tripped him up. The giant stumbled, tried to regain his footing,

but lost it utterly when the patrol-leader gave him a tremendous push in the back and sent him sprawling. He pitched sideways, his cap flew off, and his big, round head was driven with great force against the butt of a stout bamboo.

Lew went flying from his shoulders, but into the clear space of the path, and got off with a shaking. Jack leapt to his comrade's side and pulled him to his feet.

'Gee whiz, Jack!' cried Lew. 'Didn't he come a smasher? That's knocked him out of time for a bit. Come on, we can slide out while he collects his wits.'

'Half a minute,' said Jack coolly. 'He may gather them a trifle quicker than we want. We'll make him safe for a bit, and that will give us a chance to get a good start.'

'What will you do?' asked Lew.

'Tie him up,' returned Jack.

'We haven't a rope,' said Lew.

'We'll make one,' chuckled Jack.

He sprang to the side of the prostrate giant, bent down, placed both hands in the neck of his robe, and then exerting all his strength tore a great strip of it away.

'Tie his legs,' said the patrol-leader, tossing the strip of strong cloth to Lew, who went to work to devise the most cunning scout-knots to secure Ah Foo's legs.

Jack tore away another long strip, dragged the hands of their fallen foe above his head, lashed the wrists together, and took a turn of the cloth round the trunk of the bamboo against which Ah Foo had cannoned.

'I don't think he'll move in a hurry, even if he comes to,' said Jack, bounding to his feet.

'Say, Jack, look here: this is a queer mark,' cried Lew.

Jack turned and saw that his comrade was pointing to the breast of the prostrate man. The undershirt had been torn away, and there, in the centre of the breast was a strange pattern worked in the skin.

Jack took a glance at it, and whistled. 'He is an exile, then!' he cried. 'That's the mark they put on the breast of a man who has been outlawed and driven from the land.'

'Hello, who's this?' said Lew, for he now caught sight of a blue figure running towards them down the path.

'Wong, by all that's lucky!' cried Jack; and at the next moment the fisherman ran up to them.

'I heard the alarm,' cried Wong. '*Hi-yah!*' he added, looking at the captive. 'You have met Ah Foo?'

'Yes,' replied Jack; 'but that story will keep. We'll strike for the road to Wushan.'

‘Up through the wood, then,’ cried Wong, and pointed. Jack and Lew started off at once; Wong followed. As he came, he passed the body of the pirate. He bent for a second, picked something up, and slipped it into the bosom of his shirt. It was the strip of silk which formed Ah Foo’s safe-conduct.

Now he ran forward and took the lead as guide. Within three hundred yards they came to the road; but before they stepped into the open, Jack wormed forward under cover of a bush. It was well that he did so. Five or six countrymen, armed with heavy rattans, were standing in a group full in the way they must follow. It was clear that these were men who had been roused by the horns, and all strangers would be stopped and questioned.

‘This way,’ said Wong, when he learned that the direct road was blocked, and off they went at a tangent through the trees.

As they went, they passed the spot where Jack’s scout-clothes had been hidden. The garments had been made into a bundle, and tied up neatly with the lanyard of his whistle. Jack thrust his arm into the hollow tree, pulled out the bundle, tucked it under his arm, and ran on after the others.

The fisherman led the two Scouts to a point where a field of millet lay beside the wood, and

they crept among the tall stalks and were hidden from sight at once. The millet was about eight feet high, and they pushed their way through it and gained the farther boundary.

Next they passed into a growth of sorghum, whose stalwart shoots towered high above their heads, giving them perfect cover, and from the sorghum they crawled into a narrow, sunken way, which led them into a cotton plantation. In the midst of this plantation stood a small, roughly thatched shed.

'Look out, Jack!' said Lew. 'Here's a house; we may be seen!'

'It is all right,' replied the patrol-leader. 'It's only a crop-watcher's lodge—a place, you know, where a man is posted when the crop is ripe to protect it against thieves. It will be empty now; we'll go in and get a few moments out of this grilling blaze.'

All were thankful to crawl under the shade of the thatched roof and stretch themselves upon the earthen floor. Here Jack discarded his disguise, and got into his own scout-rig once more; the robes which had done him such service were made into a bundle and tossed among the cotton bushes.

'Say, Jack,' said Lew, 'the road down to Wushan seems blocked against us.'

'That road—yes,' replied Jack; 'but there

are plenty more. We'll strike over the ridge and hit the great main road on the other side of the hills. That will soon land us at home.'

'How far is it?' asked Lew.

'To the main road? About three miles,' returned Jack. 'The way lies up the glen, and there is no more cultivated land after this, so there is no fear of being spied upon. Look, you can see the line of march from here.'

Near at hand there was a hole in the wall, and Lew looked through, and saw that the cotton plantation lay in the very mouth of a glen which wound into the heart of a ridge. Up the glen lay their way of escape.

Wong peered through the hole, too, and clucked his lips with pleasure to see how near they had crept to the hills, where they would find a refuge.

'Over the hill to Chang Chuang [village of the Chang family], and then we can laugh in the faces of these dogs who wish to seize us,' he chuckled.

'Ah yes,' said Jack; 'I remember now. There is deadly enmity between this village and the Chang people, isn't there?'

'They are most bitter enemies,' replied Wong. 'There was a great battle between them last winter, when more than twenty men were killed on the two sides.'

Jack nodded. He had heard of such encounters many a time.

'Say, Jack,' broke in Lew suddenly, 'how did you find out I was shut up in that mouldy temple?'

'Why, that old rascal Yang is at the bottom of the whole business,' replied Jack; and he told the story of his discovery of the mandarin's villainy.

In return Lew narrated his adventures. He had been dragged under water and half-drowned at the time he was taken, and when drawn to the bank he was scarcely conscious. Indeed, he had never properly come to himself until he was thrust into the cage in which he was to be transported by night to Ho-Chow.

After the unsuccessful attempt to rescue him, he was carried in the cage to some small house in a garden, where he was very closely watched ['The Red Pavilion in Yang's Yamen,' remarked Jack]. There he was suddenly seized, bound anew, and blindfolded, and carried in something which was not a cage, and which was occupied by some other person, who wore rustling robes and smelt strongly of musk. [Jack explained about the woman in the chair.] Finally, about an hour before daylight, he had been led to a temple and forced into a great box. He had suffered cruelly from bond and gag, but no other violence had been offered to him.

Now while the comrades talked, a pair of tiny imps were rushing to the village with the news that three strangers were hiding in the crop-watcher's lodge. The children had been playing there, and had fled into the bushes at sight of Wong, who was leading the way, while Jack occupied the post of danger in the rear. The fisherman had not observed them; and when the little party moved forward after a short rest, not one had the smallest suspicion that they had been spied upon. They gained the glen, and pressed upwards by a narrow path which ran through thick brushwood.

'Say, this is great!' cried Lew, as they lost sight of plain and river. 'Ah Foo and his scamps are clean thrown off the track. I reckon.'

'Hope so,' said Jack. 'Ah, by the way, I've found out who the beggar is. It's a very odd story.' And he related what he had discovered.

'The viceroy's brother!' ejaculated Lew. 'Then he must have been a big gun himself at one time.'

'Must have been before he was sent into exile,' was the reply.

'Say, Jack,' said Lew, 'I've heard that it's a jolly awkward thing for an exile to come back without permission.'

'It's death,' said Jack quietly. 'If he hasn't his safe-conduct to show, any man may kill

him on sight. He is known by the mark printed on the breast. An exile who returns without permission must keep that mark closely hidden, or it's all over with him the first time he falls into unfriendly hands. But I don't think we need worry about Ah Foo this side of Wushan, at any rate.'

Jack was wrong. Again that striking and sinister figure was to enter their lives before he passed out for ever. Within two hours they were to be face to face with Ah Foo.

CHAPTER XXX. .

IN THE TEA-HOUSE.

JUST upon the close of the two hours the three comrades were seated in a tea-house in the village of the Changs. They had halted there, for Lew was very exhausted. He had endured much suffering; he had not tasted food that day, and they believed themselves to be in safety. So they went into the tea-house, which was kept by an old acquaintance of Wong's, and ordered the owner to prepare a meal for them.

Within a short time he set before them steaming bowls of rice, served with bean curd and pickled cucumber, and slices of fish freshly caught in the river. While they despatched their meal, he sat and chatted with them, for there were no other customers present. The tea-house keeper was a merry, good-natured old fellow, one of the rulers of the Chang clan, and a head-man in the village.

He was immensely delighted with Jack's shaven head, and plied him with many questions as to why he had done it. And when Jack chatted with him in Chinese as fluent as his

own, and dodged his questions, however cunningly he framed them, his laughter was uproarious.

In the midst of the meal, a wretched hunchback, a mass of rags and tatters, shuffled into the room and begged for alms. The tea-house keeper threw him a cash, and the man seized it and retired at once.

'What eyes that beggar had!' remarked Lew. 'Did you notice them, Jack? He was twiggling everybody and everything, and they flashed like fire.'

'Perhaps he's the king of a beggar crew,' returned the patrol-leader; 'they often choose a very 'cute chap to rule them, one up to every dodge and trick to squeeze a few cash out of shopkeepers.'

They thought no more of the mendicant, but finished their meal and paid the bill. It was a very modest affair, amounting to eighty cash, about twopence.

They were about to strike the road again, when a hubbub arose in the village street. The disturbance drew nearer, and, to their astonishment, Ah Foo, followed by eight or nine men carrying heavy sticks in their hands, entered the tea-house.

Their enemy had secured fresh clothing, and was clad in a jacket of blue silk. His black eyes glittered fiercely as they fell upon Jack,

and a swift look of surprise passed across his broad face and was gone. He saw now who the boy-lama had really been, but he only turned quietly to a man behind him.

The Scouts saw the pirate and his band come in with much more surprise than fear, for closely attending upon the new-comers was one-half the population of the place. The villagers had swarmed out to see what this meant. In a moment every door and window was packed with a mass of curious and hostile faces.

The hostility was not for Jack and his friends; it was for those attending upon Ah Foo. They had been recognised at once as people from the hated Yen village, and the Changs looked upon them threateningly. Behind Ah Foo stood the beggar whom he had used as a spy.

Upon no face was there a more bitter scowl than that which darkened the features of the tea-house keeper. He had lost a son in the battle between the rival villages, and he sprang to his feet and began to revile the new-comers. ‘

‘Silence!’ said Ah Foo, in tones of deep authority, and drew forward a big fellow who had been standing a little to the rear.

This was the village constable, and at sight of his neighbour the tea-house keeper was silent for a moment.

'There they are,' said Ah Foo to the constable. 'Two are "foreign devils," and the third is a pirate. You must bind them and take them at once before the mandarin Yang, whom I serve.'

These words fell upon the wrath of the villagers like water upon fire. They were ready to assail the intruders upon the instant, but if their leader came from the magistrate, another face was put upon the affair.

The Chang village was well-to-do, and its people knew Yang, in whose jurisdiction they were. They knew well that the avaricious governor would seize the smallest pretext to imprison their chief men and plunder them of their substance. Ah Foo went on speaking, and his next words crushed them lower still.

'I require all the head-men to accompany me to the Yamen in Ho-Chow. There they will account to the mandarin for harbouring these malefactors in their village. To the head-man who refuses to obey this order, the magistrate promises the punishment of the standing-cage.'

A shudder went through all present, save the escort of Ah Foo. The standing-cage was the mandarin's favourite form of torture. None doubted Yang's perfect willingness to employ it upon any who displeased him; his power to do so was absolute.

The escort of Ah Foo drew themselves up proudly, and rattled their sticks on the earthen floor. They saw the tremendous impression their leader had made. They had looked uneasy and slinking; now they gazed in triumph on the hated Changs, who stood trembling, fearful of the mandarin's wrath.

There was a sudden, swift leap of a blue-clad figure towards a window. It was Wong trying to escape. He was at once seized and dragged back to the bench where Jack and Lew were seated. And he was seized by three Changs—not by the escort. The fear of the cruel mandarin had ringed the comrades round with an unbroken mass of enemies; the men who would have fought for them two minutes before were now stern and relentless guards.

Jack's brain was working at its swiftest. He saw the terrible danger in which they stood. As Jack ran over their perilous position, he realised how thoroughly Ah Foo had them in his power. The crafty Chinaman could, of course, rely on the mandarin, and this gave him immense authority. Jack caught muttered words from the escort, and knew that once away from the village, their lives would not be worth a moment's purchase. These men were furious at the death of their friends at the hands of the viceroy; it was the hope of revenge that

had brought them in Ah Foo's train! Then there was Wong. Whatever happened to them, he was a doomed man—doomed to perish by the most horrible tortures that the cruel ingenuity of the Chinese can invent, if once he fell into Ah Foo's hands. He glanced at the brave little fisherman who had of late served him so faithfully and well. Wong was seated submissively on the bench, his eyes fixed on the floor.

Jack had only one card left to play but it might make a tremendous turn in the fortune of the game, and he played it boldly. It was time, too, for the constable was advancing with cords in his hands.

The patrol-leader leapt to his feet, and shot out an accusing forefinger. All eyes were turned upon him.

'Listen!' Jack cried; and the muttering crowd fell silent. 'Yonder man is an imposter; he is no official of the mandarin!'

Ah Foo smiled gently. His broad, yellow face and his black eyes were full of amusement.

'It is easy to say that,' he replied calmly; 'it is also easy to go to Ho-Chow, appear before the magistrate, and find who speaks the truth.'

'What mandarin has for an official a man who has been sent into exile?' cried Jack. 'You are an exile!'

Upon hearing this terrible accusation, a yell of surprise burst from the assembled crowd. All in the neighbourhood of the huge figure drew away from him.

Ah Foo's right hand made a convulsive movement towards his 'girdle; then' it was instantly dropped as he remembered that his safe-conduct was not there. He little dreamed that it was in the bosom of the fisherman's shirt, within a couple of strides of him.

There was another yell from the crowd, as every man divined what the giant sought, and knew that he had no pardon or safe-conduct to produce. With a tremendous effort, Ah Foo steadied 'himself, and waved his hand calmly.

'This is idle talk,' he said; 'it is only said to draw us aside from our duty. We will go into all these matters before the mandarin; he will pronounce judgment.'

But his face was livid, and his eyes glittered with terrible uneasiness, and the mark on his breast seemed to burn like 'an imprint of fire.

Again he made a false step. With a swift, unconscious movement, he raised his hand and felt that the fastenings of his jacket were secure—the jacket which had replaced his torn robe. As he did so, Wong gathered himself together, and made a second rush; this time straight across the open space which lay between himself and Ah Foo.

With incredible speed and nimbleness, the fisherman darted up to the giant, dodged a tremendous blow which the latter launched at him, and then swarmed up his body like a leopard springing up a tree-trunk. He drove his fingers into the neck of Ah Foo's clothing, and then placed his feet against the pirate's body and hurled himself backwards with all his weight and force. This strange attack was fearfully effective; there was a sound of rending linen—jacket and undershirt were torn right away, and Ah Foo was naked to the waist.

The tea-house keeper leapt forward, his eyes blazing with excitement, his hand outstretched.

'The mark!' he roared. 'Look! look! the mark of exile!'

All eyes were fixed on that strange blazon in the centre of the broad, heaving chest, and even the escort drew hastily away from the man who was an outlaw, who had no place in China—no right to live in the land of his birth.

'Kill! kill!' howled the tea-house keeper. 'He is an exile!'

And on all sides rose the wild 'yells of 'Kill! kill!'

In that exciting moment the whole position changed like magic. The hunter became the hunted, the cowed onlookers recovered their mastery of the situation, and Ah Foo knew that

he was ringed by infuriated foes. He whirled round, and charged for the door with all his tremendous strength. His great arms swung like huge flails, and he struck men out of his way as if they had been children.

He would have escaped had not the tea-house keeper been close upon his heels. The old fellow seized the long pigtail streaming behind Ah Foo, dexterously twisted it around his hands, and then gave it such a terrific jerk that the giant's head flew back as if his neck was dislocated. At the same instant a bystander snatched a staff from the hands of one of the escort, and delivered a terrific stroke on Ah Foo's shaven crown. Down he went, and his followers fled, glad to escape from the shower of blows which their enemies began to rain upon them.

'Come on, Lew, we'll get out of this!' cried Jack; and he and his comrade leapt through a window into the garden behind the tea-house. The men who had packed the window had sprung forward to join in the furious struggle.

As the Scouts sprang out, they cast a glance into the room where the wild battle was raging. They saw that the giant had fought his way to his feet once more. He was fighting madly, furiously, like a wild beast turned at bay, and around him the mob was surging, howling, and

yelling, and striking at him with every weapon which came to hand, and pouring on him a hail of missiles.

It was an outburst of the murderous rage which lies beneath the placid exterior of every Chinaman. Suddenly the pirate captain went down afresh, and the wild eddy of fight closed over him. The Scouts turned their heads and sprang from the window. It was a long good-bye to Ah Foo; he would never cross their path again.

They gained the road, and went a full couple of miles towards Wushan at a swinging trot; then they fell into scouts' pace. Hardly a word passed between them.

They made another mile, and passed the corner where the direct road to Ho-Chow turned off. Jack glanced back up the road by which they had come. 'Here's Wong,' he said.

The fisherman was following at full speed, and soon came up to them.

'All is right now,' he said. 'Ah Foo is killed, and the Yen people have fled back to their village.'

Jack glanced at his companion. In the frightful heat of the day, Lew's face was running with sweat, his breath was spent; he was almost ready to fall from exhaustion.

'We've got clear away,' said Jack. 'We'll

take a rest before we go farther. Let's lie down for half-an-hour in the shade.'

He turned in among a thicket of bamboos, and his companions followed. They lay down in the grateful shade, and for a time little was said. Then Wong began, in a low voice, a narrative of the scene in the tea-house after the boys had gone. He was in the midst of it, when Jack held up his hand.

'Keep quiet,' said the patrol-leader; 'I hear a lot of people coming along the road.'

They lay close in the thicket and watched. Perhaps it was a peaceful party of travellers on the march; perhaps not. In any case, they were not going to take any chances, and they lay still and watched the road through a gap in the bushes.

Presently a straggling line of soldiers appeared, and they knew by their dress and accoutrements that these were genuine soldiery, troops of the viceroy, and not the rabble of the local mandarin. Then they saw a chair in the midst of the marching men, and next a second.

Lew was on his feet in an instant, racing for the second chair, whose curtains were undrawn. He gained it, and hailed its occupant cheerfully. 'Say, dad,' murmured the Scout, 'I hope you haven't parted with any of that twenty thousand.'

'Lew!' roared Mr Standing, 'Lew, my lad! You here! Are you all right?'

'Never righter,' replied the corporal with a cheerful smile. 'Thanks to old Jack. He's brought me off from those rogues in great style.'

Mr Standing shouted to the coolies to set him down, but he had tumbled out of the chair in double-quick time almost before it had reached the ground, and at the next instant Jim Wallace came running from the top end of the procession.

'Say, boys,' shouted Jim, 'this is good to see you! We were just on our way back, regularly stumped what to do.'

'We were stumped, that's a fact,' said Mr Standing, 'for General Liu seemed 'somehow or other to be cooling off; seemed as if he wasn't so willing to help as he had been.'

'I fancy I can explain that,' said Jack; and he went into the question of the relationship between the viceroy and Ah Foo.

Mr Standing whistled. 'Say, that takes the kinks out of the tangle right away,' said the merchant. 'Now I see how things stand.'

For the next ten minutes there was a busy cross-fire of question and answer and explanation, and by that time an 'outline of the Scouts' adventures had been given and a whole host of doubtful points cleared up. Wong was introduced, and his share of the adventures described.

'I'll see he's a made man for life,' said Mr Standing. 'That is, if five hundred dollars will do it, and I reckon it will from what I know of 'em.'

The escort of soldiers stood patiently by, their yellow faces showing no interest in these 'foreign devils,' who talked so eagerly in the strange language they did not understand.

'Say, Mr Standing,' said Jim at last, 'that old scamp Yang ought to get it pretty hot for this business.'

The merchant's eyes shone with anger.

'We can't touch him, Jim!' he snapped. 'We can't lay a finger on him.'

'Lay a finger!' murmured Jim; 'lay a club on him, we ought, I should fancy.'

'So we ought, and well the old villain deserves it!' cried Mr Standing. 'But how are we going to get at him? He will deny everything. He will take care we can obtain no actual proof. And then there's Ah Foo, the viceroy's own brother, mixed up with it. General Liu, for the sake of his own family—and there's no more powerful motive to a Chinaman—will help Yang to keep things quiet. And without the viceroy's help we cannot move in the affair. No, turn it which way you may, there's no chance of hitting Yang.'

'Well,' said Jim, 'we've got 'em back. Here are Lew and Jack, as large as life and just as

healthy. They 're safe now, and we'll take care to keep 'em safe henceforward. There's something in that.'

'There's everything,' said Mr Standing.—'Everything, Jack,' he went on, seizing the patrol-leader's hand. 'How can I thank you, my brave lad, for all you've done for Lew? Nothing could have saved him from these villains but your pluck and resource. How can I repay you?'

'That's all right, Mr Standing,' said Jack, his dark eyes bright with his usual cheerful smile. 'I was bound to stand by and lend a hand, you know. We are Brother Scouts.'

THE END.

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